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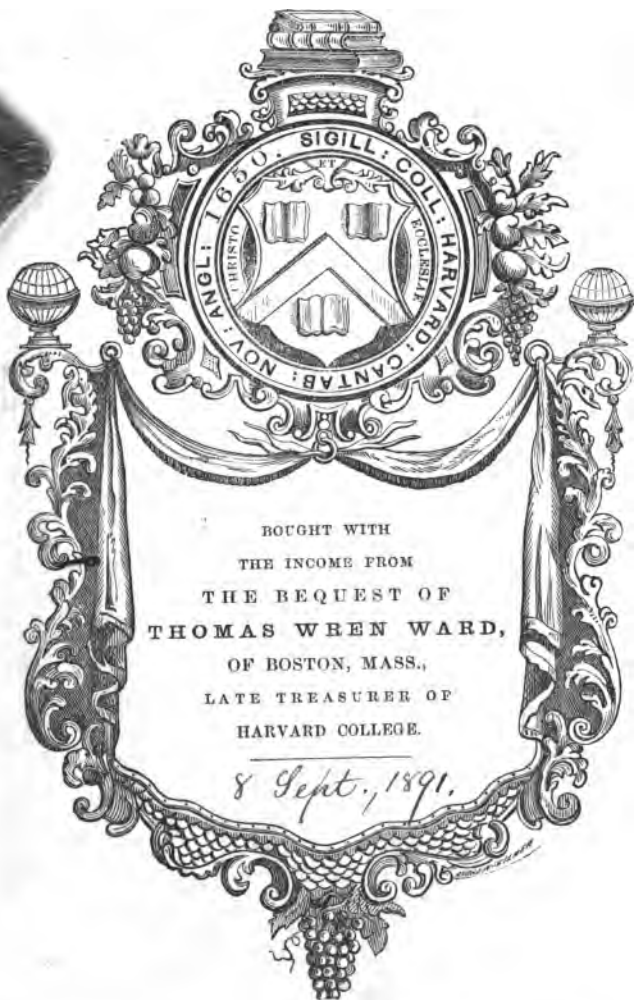
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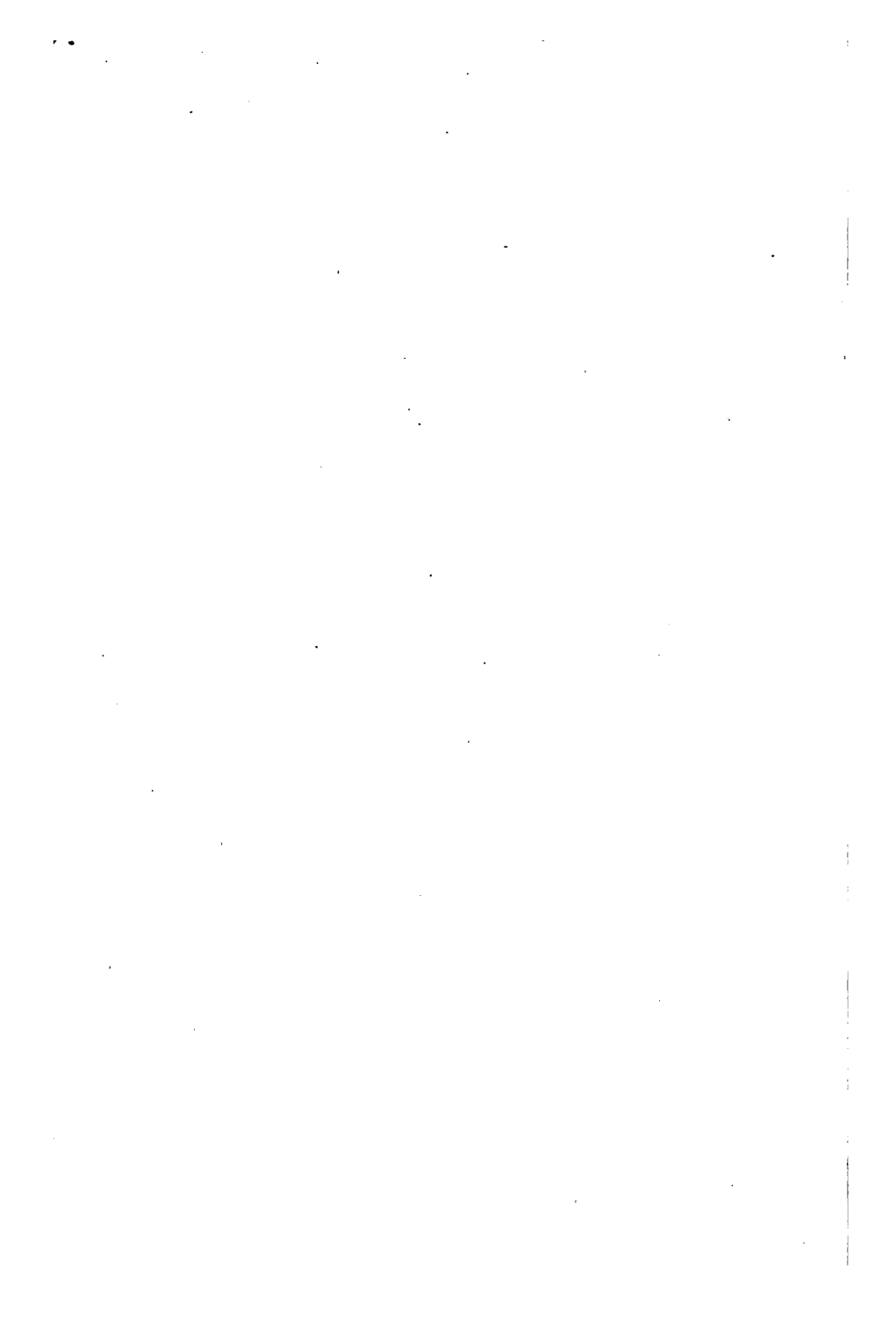
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ST. KILDA AND THE ST. KILDIAHS



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ST. KILDA AND THE ST. KILDIA NS

BY

ROBERT CONNELL

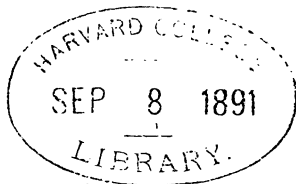
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P R E F A C E.

It is necessary to say a word in explanation of the appearance of this little book. The author had occasion to visit St. Kilda twice as the "Special Correspondent" of the *Glasgow Herald*—first, in October, 1885, when he accompanied the expedition sent to relieve the pressing wants of the islanders, and again in June, 1886, when he remained fifteen days on the island. The articles which he contributed, as a result of both visits, have been to some extent re-written and considerably expanded, in order, if possible, to bring them more into keeping with

the permanent form they are now made to assume. It is hoped the republication of the articles may help to keep before the public mind the absolute necessity of something being done to ameliorate the condition of the St. Kildians.

The author desires to express his acknowledgments to the Editor of the *Glasgow Herald* for permission to republish the various articles.

GLASGOW, *April*, 1887.

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ST. KILDA AND THE ST. KILDIA NS.

CHAPTER I.

THE RELIEF EXPEDITION OF 1885.

THE island of St. Kilda, rising like a lone sentinel out of the white breakers of the North Atlantic, was the object of much solicitude throughout the United Kingdom in the month of October, 1885. As is generally known the little peak-shaped island, which is open to navigation for only a few months each year, has not unfrequently been the cause of public anxiety. In the year mentioned St. Kilda, or Hirta as the islanders themselves call it, was consigned to its annual hibernation at the end of August, when it was briefly visited about the same time by the factor's smack, carrying the mails, and by Mr. Cartwright's yacht the "Firefly." In ordinary circumstances nothing more would have been heard of the island till probably the month of June following. Events arose, however, which brought St. Kilda before the world much sooner. On the last Thurs-

day of September a "message from the sea" was washed ashore near Gallan Point, in the Uig district of Lewis. It had been despatched from St. Kilda, where, according to the contents, there had been one of the periodical storms to which the island is subject, and great damage done to the crops. One or two other "messages" to the same effect were found at different places on the west coast of the Hebrides.

As it afterwards turned out one of the messages was written by a schoolboy in St. Kilda, and it unquestionably exaggerated the situation on the island. It was the first to be made public, and as it represented the islanders to be actually starving, there was naturally much anxiety all over the country for their welfare. A letter from the minister of the island to the Rev. Dr. Rainy reached the mainland shortly after and somewhat reassured the public mind, as it made it clear that what had mainly been destroyed by the storm was the seed for next year's crop, and that it was this which was wanted rather than immediate food.

Writing to Dr. Rainy of the Free Church on the 16th September, Mr. Mackay said:—"Rev. and Dear Sir—I beg leave to intimate to you that I am directed by the people under my charge on this island to tell you that their corn, barley, and potatoes are destroyed by a great storm which passed over this island on Saturday and Sabbath last. You will be kind enough

to apply to Government in order to send us a supply of corn seed, barley, and potatoes. This year's crop is quite useless. They never before saw such a storm at this time of the year. They have lost one of their boats; but happily there was no loss of life."

Dr. Rainy communicated the substance of the letter to the Government, who were primarily called upon to act, but, pending a reply, he and Sir William Collins, of Glasgow, decided to send aid at once and on their own responsibility to the islanders, and appeal to the charitable public to defray the cost. The season being so far advanced it was advisable to use all diligence, as the weather must soon break up. Accordingly a Glasgow steamer, the "Hebridean," was chartered to make a special trip to the island, and a sufficient quantity of seed corn, barley, meal, potatoes, &c., to the value of £110, including freight, was shipped. The vessel left Glasgow on the afternoon of Thursday, October 15, the writer being the only passenger on board. At Oban and the other places on the west coast where the "Hebridean" called, the news of our mission, had preceded us, and, naturally enough, the relief ship was the object of much interest. It had been carefully stipulated by the owners that the "Hebridean" should only attempt to make St. Kilda in the event of the weather being entirely favourable, and thus it came about that even on the Saturday night, when we lay off Lochboisdale, the

master of the vessel was still undecided whether or not to steer for our destination on the morrow. Everything depended on the weather, which happily had so far been mild and agreeable.

Resuming the voyage on Sunday at daybreak, we reached Obbe, Harris, at half-past eleven, not, however, without experiencing the discomforts of the Western Main. So far we had been beating about under the lee of the Hebrides, but now, with the most favourable of winds blowing from the north-east and a good firm glass, the word of command was given, and the smart little steamer having felt her way through the dangerous narrows of the Sound of Harris, darted out on the great billows of the broad Atlantic straight for the little speck on the distant horizon which we were told to believe was St. Kilda. It is worth recording here in a word that notwithstanding the advanced period of the year the run of about 50 miles from the sound of Harris to St. Kilda, was never made under more favourable conditions. The sun shone out brilliantly all the time we were on the water; the wind, at first a little troublesome, moderated to a gentle breeze, and the swell of the mighty ocean, trying enough no doubt in all conscience to a landsman, was a mere ripple compared with what is often experienced in those seas.

We reached St. Kilda at half-past four in the afternoon. Long before we cast anchor under lee of the island, eager glasses were busy scanning its rocky slopes

for some trace of the poor people whom we had come to relieve. We drew pictures in our minds of the sad straits to which they had been reduced, and soon found ourselves believing that if they were not doing sentry-duty on each coigne of vantage, in order to hail a passing vessel for help, it must be the extreme misery to which they were reduced that stood in the way. But then we remembered it was Sunday, and quite naturally the next thought which occurred to us was that the islanders had peculiar views about the observance of the day of rest. Moreover, it was matter of common report, known to all on board, that the worthy pastor of the island added one other to his many virtues of head and heart in the supreme wealth of his Sunday fare, which as a rule entertained the good people of the island from early morn to dusk; and we ventured to guess that, though it was now late in the afternoon, divine service was still going on, and all the islanders, even the famishing watchmen, were at church. While we were speculating on the deserted appearance of the island the "Hebridean" steamed into the bay of St. Kilda, and cast anchor about 300 yards from the shore, right abreast of the crescent-shaped row of crofters' cottages which stand about a hundred yards back from the water's edge, and in which the entire population of the island find shelter if not accommodation. Still no one was visible.

The steam-whistle of the "Hebridean" was blown,

and in a moment the scene was changed. All was life and activity. A number of people, mostly women, were seen running to and fro through the township, but it was remarkable that no one seemed to think of coming down to the shore to put off to us. It was also noticeable that the manse, which stands beside the church—somewhat apart from the rest of the village—still wore its deserted appearance, presumably sheltering behind its closed door the figure of the Rev. John Mackay, familiar to some of us who had not yet had the pleasure of seeing the Rev. gentleman in the flesh from the well known picture of Mr Sands, and whom, let it be frankly said, we had expected to see in truly patriarchal fashion leading the way to the shore to bid us welcome, and convey through us the thanks of his flock to their kind benefactors. But we were disappointed, and the order was given to lower a boat from the “Hebridean.” While this was being done the church doors were opened and a stream of men and women issued forth like bees. They ran down to the shore, and, reinforced by the others from the village who it appeared had been absenting themselves from Mr. Mackay’s ministrations, made an anxious group on the rocks awaiting the arrival of the “Hebridean’s” boat, in which were Captain M’Callum, managing owner of the vessel, Captain Alexander, from New Zealand, and the writer. As soon as Captain M’Callum was recognised the islanders raised a cry of joy, which was only sup-

pressed from swelling into a cheer by the fact that it was the Sabbath, and therefore not a day for any unholy display of the sort. But the Sabbatarian zeal of the St. Kildians did not preclude them from helping us to clamber over the rocks of their wild shore, or from extending to us a shake of the hand truly Highland in its warmth, and saluting us with the Gaelic "*Ciamar tha sibh.*" They pressed round about us in little knots quite as interesting from the picturesqueness of their dress as from the deep anxiety stamped upon every face, and insisted upon being told in Gaelic, times without number, of the timely supplies on board the "Hebridean," and of Sir William Collins, Dr. Rainy, and the other kind people in Glasgow and Edinburgh who had sent them.

They are an excitable, emotional people these St. Kildians. At any time the arrival of a vessel is sufficient to throw the entire population into a sort of panic. This visit of the "Hebridean" being an unusually big event seemed to put the poor people literally beside themselves. In such a mental condition they displayed in a marked degree, although no doubt unconsciously, their dominant characteristics. Most of all there was apparent their deep-rooted dread of the Sassenach, and they did not conceal their fear of some of the members of our party, even although we were bringing gifts. The constant dread of the Sassenach is one of the most singular idiosyn-

cracies of this singular people. There is a tradition that the island was at one time ravaged and almost depopulated, though it would appear by the Celt and not the Saxon, and this may have given rise to the dread of strangers in which the people constantly live. But why the Sassenach should be singled out for especial disfavour there is nothing to show. Before our party had walked 20 yards in the direction of the village, the islanders told us a remarkable story, which, while illustrating this peculiar frame of mind, may be taken as explaining to some extent the coolness, if not actual suspicion, with which the relief vessel was at first regarded by the islanders. The night before our arrival one of the married women in the island heard, or imagined she heard, the report of a gun being fired, and communicating this piece of intelligence to her husband, the two of them talked the matter over, and afterwards took counsel with some neighbours. As a result of their deliberations the poor terror-haunted islanders came to the conclusion that a Sassenach fleet had arrived off the coast to put them to the sword. They were sufficiently wise in their generation to connect the fleet with the begging letters which they had sent on this and previous occasions.

No time was to be lost in escaping from the persecuting Sassenach, and the whole of the little band took to the hills and spent the night in hiding.

With the return of day they came back to the village, but their fears were not calmed, for several of the women confessed to me that when the "Hebridean" set the echoes a-ringing, they felt sure that the hostile fleet had come at last, and great drops of sweat fell from their foreheads. Perhaps it was something of a fellow-feeling which had induced the Rev. Mr. Mackay to bring his sermon to an abrupt close, as we learned at the same time that he did. If the Sassenach was at last upon them why should not he make good his escape too? Before we had walked far we were confronted by the reverend gentleman himself. He came out of his manse to welcome us. Captain M'Callum briefly intimated the object of our visit to the island, and asked the minister, as the head of the community, when the stuff on board the "Hebridean" could be taken ashore. "Not to-day," said the minister, sternly. "Then," asked the captain, "can you assure me of favourable weather in the morning, because if the wind shifts I must be off?" The minister could promise nothing of the kind. He could only promise that his people would be ready to man the boats as soon as the Sabbath was out, not a minute before; and he trusted that the same Providence which had put it into men's hearts to send corn and potatoes would keep the wind steady in the north-east. Captain M'Callum, knowing the strong Sabatarian prejudices of the islanders, made no attempt

to overcome their scruples, but told them to be ready promptly at midnight. This little matter settled, we were free to visit the village, see the interior of the houses, and converse with the people.

We learned the particulars of the storm which had devastated the island. It began about three o'clock, on the afternoon of Saturday, September 12, and raged till the Monday morning following. Great showers of salt spray from the sea were blown over Ruaval Point, on the west side of the Bay of St. Kilda, and carried over the whole of the eastern slope of the island on which the islanders grow their scanty crops. Five messages asking help were sent adrift on separate occasions. The messages were all in the form of letters addressed to private gentlemen or firms in different parts of the kingdom, and they were enclosed in little toy boats, and boxes, and one in a tin cannister. No doubt appeared to be entertained by the islanders that some of the messages would reach their destination—for they had successfully tried the same method of communicating with the mainland before—but they were agreeably surprised that a tangible answer to their request for help should have come so soon. They were surprised also that the answer should have come, not from the Government, but from gentlemen in Glasgow and Edinburgh, of whom, with the exception of Dr. Rainy, they were totally ignorant. Being Free

Churchmen, the islanders had a dim, hazy notion that Dr. Rainy was a kind of "boss" in their denomination; but of Sir William Collins, none of them, not even the minister, had even so much as heard his name, at least so they said.

Before dark set in our party made a round of the village and took advantage of the opportunity to inspect the interiors of the houses, and also to learn many facts about the social economy of this singular community. In every respect, so far as the mere question of creature comforts is concerned, the people seemed better off than the crofters in, say Skye, for instance. Sabbath even though it was, the minister of the island honoured us with an invitation to tea. Mr. Mackay, who had then been twenty years on the island, and was bordering on seventy, evinced great curiosity about the Pope and the spread of the cholera. He had heard nothing of the ravages of the cholera since the end of August, but he ventured a guess that the deaths in Spain alone must have amounted by the time of our visit to several millions. I knew the old gentleman had no love for the Scarlet Woman, but I was hardly prepared for this wholesale slaughter in his imagination of the poor Spaniards for no offence that I know of except that they are papists. He seemed reassured when I told him that the cholera had not broken out in Scotland; on this point his inquiries were direct

and pressing, presumably from a fear of our having brought the scourge with us. Inveterately suspicious of the Sassenach and all his ways, the St. Kildians regard every visitor as a possible medium for communicating cholera or fever, or at the very least "a cold" (*cnatan na gall*).

Towards nearly all other current affairs this Hebridean Rip Van Winkle showed a truly sublime indifference. He cared not a brass farthing for the general election then in progress, and his flock, he said, cared as little. I had to explain to him what a "crofter's candidate" meant, and the only answer he made was a sickly smile, which was repeated when I told him that everybody now had a vote. Ultimately he did condescend to tell me that "his people"—so he always spoke of them—had a hope that when the polling day came they would be taken away in a boat to record their votes. None of them, however, knew who the candidates for their suffrages were.

Much of Mr. Mackay's disinclination to talk upon this and other secular subjects was due to the fact that the day was Sunday; but on one matter the old Adam got the better of the good man's Sabbatarian zeal. I stated to him that the Rev. Dr. Gordon, of Glasgow, and other gentlemen, had suggested in letters to the *Glasgow Herald*, that the island of St. Kilda ought to be abandoned finally,

with all convenient speed, and the people transplanted in a body to some other island of the Outer Hebrides, or to the mainland; what had he to say to the proposal? It was fair and reasonable, he said, but it was for the people themselves, and not for him to pronounce upon it. It was Sabbath, he went on to say, and nothing could be done till another day. After a little, however, the worthy minister did not hesitate to do on a small scale what he deprecated in the aggregate. His housekeeper being a native of the island had some right to give her opinion, and being appealed to by name, she declared that St. Kilda was the biggest prison in all the world. Would she be willing to leave it? Well, she would go if the minister went; no matter whether her brothers went or not. In reply to a further observation she expressed her feelings for the good men who had made the proposal. She wished that they might never die, but that if they must die that they should go to the "good place." The minister insisted that a meeting of the men should be held in the "Hebridean" when they came on board at midnight to take away the stuff, and the matter then put before them for their consideration; but of course this was impracticable, and nothing further was done with the proposal, which, however, Mr. Mackay again and again reverted to, thereby leading one to believe that he would gladly

embrace it. Mr. Mackay had next to be satisfied as to who "Sir Collins" was; and the good man waxed eloquent in praise of Sir William's disinterested endeavours to promote the welfare of the people of St. Kilda. Before leaving we obliged Mr. Mackay, at his request, with Greenwich time. His watch, which of course keeps time for the whole island, was found to be two hours fast. This, however, the old man assured us with a chuckle, was an advantage rather than otherwise. It enabled him to bring his flock together on Sunday at the early hour of nine instead of eleven, while at the same time everybody but himself was ignorant of the pious little fraud.

At half-past eleven o'clock the steam whistle of the "Hebridean" apprised the islanders that the day of rest was nearly out, and promptly at midnight the first boat came off from the shore. A second boat afterwards joined in the work of discharging the cargo, and the supplies were all ashore by half-past three o'clock. As soon as the last of the cargo was ashore the "Hebridean" weighed anchor, and retraced her course across the Atlantic to the northern islands of the Hebrides. The relief expedition was at an end, and it had been a complete success.

It is pleasant to record the fact that the cost of the expedition was met by public subscription almost in a single day, and while the result of the "Hebri-

dean's" voyage was yet a matter of uncertainty. The names of the subscribers are given in the Appendix.

CHAPTER II.

ST. KILDA REVISITED.

MEANWHILE the Government were not altogether deaf to the appeal of the St. Kildians which had been forwarded through Dr. Rainy. They instructed Mr. Malcolm M'Neill, Inspecting Officer of the Board of Supervision, to proceed at once to the island and report on the condition of the people. H.M.S. "Jackal" was placed at his service, and, with Mr. M'Neill on board, she left her station in Rothesay Bay on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 20, 1885. St. Kilda was reached at half-past eight on the morning of the 22nd. Mr. M'Neill and Commander Osborne of the "Jackal" immediately went ashore and held a prolonged conference in the manse with the minister, the schoolmaster, and the resident ground officer. Mr. M'Neill afterwards conferred with the people themselves, and informed himself on the various points to which his attention had been directed by the Government. The result of his inquiries, although

communicated to the Government two days later, was not made public till the month of April following. Briefly put, Mr. M'Neill's report amounted to this, that the inhabitants of the island "were amply, indeed luxuriously, supplied" for the coming winter; that nothing further was necessary to ensure their comfort during the winter, the seed for next year's crop, which was indeed urgently required, having been supplied by the "Hebridean;" that the people were on the whole well off, there being a large sum of money said to average not less than £20 per family hoarded in the island; that something might be done to improve the condition of the people by constructing a landing-place; and, further, in view of the anxieties which the isolated position of the islanders must periodically produce, that it ought to be considered whether it might not be wise and in the end economical to assist the people to emigrate, as nearly all of them desired to do.

Mr. M'Neill's report, as I have said, was not made public till the month of April, 1886. In the interval some anxiety was manifested regarding the condition of the islanders by the numerous people interested in their welfare; and in order to ascertain precisely how matters stood, it was arranged before the appearance of Mr. M'Neill's report that I should again visit St. Kilda on the first opportunity presenting itself. The first opportunity did not occur till June. At that

time there had not been a scrap of news for eight months from the unique little colony of our countrymen—not since the hurried visits of the “Hebridean” and the “Jackal” in the October previous. This visit in June which brought the ocean-girt island once more into touch with the rest of the world was made at the instance of the factor, Mr. John T. Mackenzie, Dunvegan, who spends several days on St. Kilda every year to collect rents and transact other business with the people.

Our tiny vessel, the “Robert Hadden,” a smack of 60 tons, carrying the mails and usual supplies for the islanders, was ready for her adventurous trip on Tuesday, the 8th of June. Besides Mr. Mackenzie and his son, the only other passengers were Mr. George Murray, who was going out to be schoolmaster at St. Kilda for a term of twelve months, and the writer.

We had one prayer, and that for fine weather, but it was turned to our confusion, for no sooner were we on board than the elements set themselves against us in a manner quite different from what, and perhaps in a way even more exasperating than, we had calculated upon. We had prayed that there might be no stress of wind, but we were left without any wind at all. For several hours our little smack lay becalmed off Dunvegan Pier. In ordinary circumstances we should have found content in admiring that beautiful panorama of sea and land, of bare

rocky headland, soft sylvan slopes, crumbling haunted castle, and bleak towering mountains, which sets out Dunvegan as the brightest jewel of Skye; but our thoughts were over the wild waters of the Minch, and we had no heart for the beautiful, even for one of the loveliest sunsets that ever heightened the effects of this picturesque place.

By seven on Wednesday morning we had crept only some two miles down Loch Follart, the waters of which were calm as a mill-pond. Ten o'clock found us only at the foot of the loch. Our passage across the Minch was variable, the wind sometimes condescending to waft us along at the rate of five miles an hour, and at other times completely deserting us. We entered the Sound of Harris at half-past three. Strong adverse currents retarded us here sadly, and it was late in the evening before our smack darted out into the wide Atlantic with a course set for St. Kilda. The Atlantic dealt kindly with us. She gave us a fair wind, and did not do more than threaten our destruction. We were grateful for the wind, and did not much mind the threat. When we rubbed our eyes next morning (Thursday) it was to look on the green slopes of the romantic little island. The anchor was dropped at seven o'clock, and not a soul was then to be seen stirring on the shore. The dogs, more watchful than their masters, came down like a great company of evil

spirits to the landing-place, and hailed us with the most fiendish barking. It was something to get a welcome of any kind, for the morning was raw and cold, and a thick fog enveloping the hills which surround the semicircular bay of St. Kilda made us reflect that after all it was safer to be on such a shore than at sea. In a little the people, aroused from their slumbers by the barking of the dogs, came streaming down to the landing-place, and soon we had the entire available population of the island standing on the rocks, the men forming one group and the women another. The men were dressed, after their fashion, in heavy garments made of blanketing, and muffled to the ears with big coarse cravats twisted round their necks roll upon roll. They take anything but kindly, those strange islanders, to the health-giving breezes which sweep their sea-girt rock. The women made a much more picturesque group. They were all barefoot, wore short petticoats and dresses reaching only to about their knees, and for head-dress disported bright Turkey-red napkins. This last article is worn at all times by the women of the island, and contributes greatly to the picturesque appearance which they present to the eye of a stranger.

It was some little time before the men made up their minds to put off to us in a boat. The reason we afterwards divined. It was painful to see the clumsiness with which they set to the task of getting

the boat into the water and plying the oars. Evidently the St. Kildians are not on good terms with the ocean. When the half-dozen boatmen came alongside our little craft, they hailed us with their Gaelic gibberish, and those of us who were able returned the salutation. Then from several tongues at one and the same moment came the question of the hour, which every islander was dying to put—*Cait' am bheil an cogadh?* (Where is the war raging?) There was anxiety in the looks of the men, as well as vigour in the abruptness of the strange question. The poor creatures, it appeared, had made up their minds that this incomprehensible Sassenach, who is synonymous to their minds with all that is dread and mysterious and demoniacal in nature, and who only makes himself visible in gunboats and tipsy tourists and charity oatmeal—that this inexplicable race was engaged in a great war by land and sea. If the factor's smack did not come in March it was because the Sassenach was conserving his energies for the mighty struggle nearer home; if fewer vessels than usual passed on the distant horizon, it was because this still incomprehensible Sassenach was sweeping the seas; if the sea-birds did not come to breed on St. Kilda in as great numbers as formerly, it was the Sassenach again. He was luring the birds to his own rocks in order to feed his hungry soldiers and sailors. They

had even gone the length of congratulating the schoolmaster, Mr. M'Callum, that he was in St. Kilda, and not in his Argyllshire home, where he would certainly have been pressed to bear arms for this hated, but irresistible, race.

When we had satisfied the poor people that the great Sassenach race still possessed his borders in peace, and that, indeed, the world was peace, they ventured to come on board. Scarcely had we time to shake hands with them than we were staggered by a volley of questions about the crofters, the six men still speaking simultaneously, like a Greek chorus. The Greeks, no doubt, contrived to speak in something like harmony, but the St. Kildian chattering was done in a variety of the most discordant keys from B flat to the low A. We were confronted with such posers as "How is the Crofter question getting on?" "What are the landlords doing?" "Have their heads been chopped off yet?" And so on. I have no doubt the Crofters may be very excellent people, but at that moment I sincerely wished them and their grievances at the bottom of the ocean, rather than that they should stand between me and a substantial breakfast on shore, so the great Crofter question was shelved. On another matter they were a little more importunate. They asked Mr. Mackenzie whether any more charity meal and potatoes had been sent to them by the good people in Glasgow

and Edinburgh, and they did seem somewhat disappointed when an answer was given in the negative. One of them, with much plainness of speech, told the factor that he might have raised more money and fetched more food for nothing. Charity has generally but one effect, whether the recipients be St. Kildians or the poor profligate nearer home.

On landing we had a cordial greeting from the islanders assembled on the shore. Everybody pressed forward to shake hands with us, and the dirt on the hands varied from a day's to a month's growth. I shuddered at the task before me, but a way out of the difficulty that I had not calculated upon was found. One of my companions let it be known to the gaping crowd that I was a veritable Sassenach, and thereupon a good many of the dirtiest of the proffered paws were withdrawn. It is the invariable practice to shake hands with everybody on the island at least once every day, and although my Sassenach blood exempted me from the custom for a little, I was not spared long. There was, however, always this consolation, that the island is so small, and the supply of unwashed hands limited. The islanders remembered my visit with the "Hebridean" in October previous, and possibly that helped them the sooner to forgive my Sassenach birth. Certainly they did not forget the differences between Saxon and Celt, and all the time I was on the island I had

to act as a kind of spokesman on behalf of my race.

The islanders would give us no peace to eat a much-needed breakfast till they had related all the events of their little world during the past eight months. We had to listen to various accounts of the weather and the doings of the unseen powers. There was a great commotion in the heavens on the 27th November from 6 to 10 p.m., and the display of shooting stars was pronounced by the old men to be the most extraordinary they had ever witnessed. Then on April 2 there was a fearful storm, lasting all day, the wind blowing from the south. No damage was done. On the whole the winter was a severe one, but the flocks did not suffer much. As is always the case a number of sheep and lambs were blown from the rocks into the sea. A quantity of wreckage and a log of timber were washed ashore during the winter. A vessel's hatchway was also thrown up by the sea about three weeks before our visit.

The islanders showed a marked reticence in speaking to me about the gratuitous provisions and seed sent by the "Hebridean." Ultimately I discovered the reason. There was a "big row" in the little island world over the distribution of the eleemosynary meal and potatoes which some of us at the time fully expected to be sanctified in the using, seeing

we made such a sacrifice in deferring their disembarkation till the Sabbath was out. Not so, however. No sooner was the prow of the "Hebridean" turned than the little commonwealth, which affects the apostolic theory of all things in common, was shaken to its centre by contending factions of Macdonald's and M'Quien's, who set up rival claims to the coveted provisions. It is very fine to be like the Apostles when there is only an ounce of tobacco at stake, and the number of persons who can share in its division does not exceed twelve. But it is a different matter when you have a shipload of corn and potatoes to deal with, and as many real and fancy claims to their possession as the wit of a whole tribe of hungry men and women can devise. Thus it came about that the communistic principle, which had worked admirably in St. Kilda in the disposal of stray ounces of rubbishy tobacco, threatened to break down under the new and perplexing strain.

It was in the manse kitchen, of all places in the world, that the battle which began in the grey light of that October Monday morning raged the fiercest. In justice to the Rev. John Mackay I must say that, so far as I learned, he took no part personally in the extraordinary scene, which lasted, I was credibly informed, for three hours. Mr. Mackay is not by any means a fighting man, but he has for house-keeper a remarkable woman, standing about six feet

high, and proportionately well built, who is the terror of the whole island. When this person opens her mouth, no dog—not even the poor minister—dare bark. In disposing of the meal and potatoes the housekeeper fully expected that her word was to be law. One man had the temerity to object, and hence the row, in which others joined with much zest, and in which the communistic principle was attacked and defended with a vigour creditable to the occasion and the place. In the end the housekeeper was vanquished, and the leader of the opposing force vowed that he would never again enter a church door unless the minister dismissed this troubler of Israel. The poor woman accepted her fate, and retired to her father's house with much lamentation and tears. Oh, the strange irony that often haunts us in this world! My readers will remember that only the night before this very woman on being asked for her views on the subject of emigration loudly protested that whatever others might do she would never desert the minister, but would go with him if need be to the end of the world, no matter whether her father or her brothers went or not. The poor minister! how he chuckled at the time over the woman's devotion, little thinking that the fickle one was to desert him next day. In the enforced absence of the housekeeper the "Hebridean" gifts were divided equally among the householders, the

minister getting his share along with the others. Mr. Mackay bore up under his bereavement for a single day. On the Tuesday he hid himself to the retreat of the faithless one, and besought her, with tears in his eyes, to return to his service. She complied, and so the comedy ended as all comedies do. Even the threatened breach in Zion was averted, for the misguided man, who had vowed to give over going to church, made his peace with a pastor whose power is as arbitrary as that of the Pope of Rome.

We learned to our disgust on arriving at St. Kilda that eight men and a woman were absent on the adjoining rock of Boreray. We were disgusted, because as the eight comprised the most of the able-bodied men, we were told that little could be done in unloading the vessel till their return. They had gone to pluck the sheep, which, along with the sea-birds, have the rock of Boreray to themselves. The operation known to most civilised men as sheep-shearing gives place here to a barbarous system of tearing the fleece off the animal's back with the fingers. This is called plucking. We were further disgusted to learn that although the party had been away since the Monday previous they had carried an elder with them. Let me explain what this means. Whenever a party of St. Kildians carry an elder with them to any of the adjacent rocks, it means that they intend to be from home over the

Sunday. The elder is a sort of ornamental man, carried not so much for the purpose of assisting in snaring birds or plucking sheep as for conducting the services on Sunday, without which no St. Kildian would feel half happy. As the stereotyped length of the day's services is six hours, I am surprised that they have been able to find even so many as three men in St. Kilda qualified for the eldership. When, therefore, we learned that the party who had gone to Boreray included an elder, we had to make up our minds, however reluctantly, for a prolonged stay on the island, and that even although the weather should be fine, as it was not. Few people have any idea of the privations these brave St. Kildians have to put up with. A company of them will pass ten days at a time on Boreray or any other of the rocks surrounding their native island. Their bed is a hole burrowed in the ground, and their food a little oatmeal and the carcasses of sea-birds, yet they are as happy as kings so be it that they have an elder with them to conduct the devotions on Sunday.

CHAPTER III.

THE MINISTER.

I CALLED upon the Rev. Mr. Mackay in the course of my first day on the island. Mr. Mackay upholds

in this distant part of the kingdom the banner of the Free Church, which has been supreme here since the Disruption. I found the reverend gentleman seated in what appeared to be at once bed-room and study. He was engaged filling a short clay pipe, quite black enough to gratify the taste of a Lanarkshire collier. The minister wore his chimney-pot hat during the interview. I never saw one of a similar pattern before; possibly the style may have been fashionable in our grandfathers' days. I was waved in a kindly but cavalier way to one of the two chairs in the room, the rest of the furniture consisting of a rough plain table, two coarse chests resembling joiner's tool boxes, a Gaelic Bible, three or four books of theology, including Smith's *Moral Sentiments*, Harvey's *Meditations among the Tombs*, and Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, a candlestick, and a penny bottle of Perth ink. A fire of turf was simmering in a small broken grate. The good old man was kind enough to speak about my former visit to the island, and to ask various courteous questions concerning the former and the present voyage. I noticed that he was fidgety and ill at ease. Suddenly he went off in the conversation at a tangent, and without any apparent excuse commenced to denounce what he was pleased to term "the infidel newspapers." Rising from his low arm-chair and stamping his foot vehemently on the floor he thundered forth a salvo

of abuse of what he persisted in calling "the infidel newspapers." I really did not know what it was all about.

Still the ranting and raging went on, and I felt my courage evaporating like the mists of the humid island. It was not reassuring to observe the stalwart housekeeper flitting in and out of the room in an excited manner, and hissing between her closed teeth what sounded to my Sassenach ear like swearing in Gaelic. "I know it's all the doing of the Evil One," the old man cried, and he brought his hand down on the table with a thud so terrible, that I think it was meant to remind me that, although seventy, he was still able to strike a good blow. "I tell you," he continued, "it's the doing of the Father of Lies. Ah, those infidel newspapers, those infidel newspapers." I felt relieved that the blame was put on broader shoulders than mine, and so taking heart I ventured to tell the Reverend gentleman that I positively did not know what he was alluding to, having no pretension to know even half so much as he himself appeared to do about the doings of the Evil One. "What," he cried, "you come from Glasgow and do not know what they have been saying about me?" Without waiting a reply he dived headlong into a dark mysterious press in the wall of his room, muttering, as he did so, something very terrible about the Evil One and filthy lucre and the infidel news-

papers. There was something so suggestive and yet so mysterious and weird about the whole proceeding, as well as about my surroundings, that I was fully prepared at that moment to see the veritable cloven foot march out of the dim Faust-like chamber. But I was disappointed. The good old man came out with no Prince of Darkness to bear him company. He only held in his hand a copy of an Edinburgh newspaper. Before handing it over to me he was seized with another fit, but it did not frighten me much this time.

It appeared by-and-by that some friend on the mainland had sent Mr. Mackay the newspaper, in which there was a leading article characterising the destitution in St. Kilda the autumn previous as an imposture, and charging the Reverend gentleman with conniving at the fraud. It was this leader, which was carefully marked with red ink, that had raised Mr. Mackay's bile. He was surprised that I had not seen the leader before, being under the impression, as he explained to me, that the same leading articles appeared in all the newspapers in the country. His idea was that they originated in any given city or town, and travelled from place to place like a pedlar till they had discharged their duty. The leader in question, he mildly insinuated, was born in Glasgow, and had only at the date of the latest mail got as far as Edinburgh. He fixed a cunning eye on me as he

made the insinuation. This truly simple-minded clergyman was relieved when I explained to him the actual state of matters, and also the nature of a leading article, which he had believed was a sort of official document. He was particularly pleased to know that the leader in question had not been published in any Glasgow newspaper, as thereby he said it could not have come under the notice of "his friend Sir Collins."

Mr. Mackay at first refused to read a word of Mr. Malcolm M'Neill's report on the destitution in St. Kilda, because, as he said, the Evil One might have been at work there too. Ultimately, however, he was good enough to hear it read. With Mr. M'Neill's report he expressed a general approval, though he added that "Malcolm," so he familiarly spoke of the Board of Supervision official, had taken too large an estimate of the amount of food in the island at the date of his visit. Speaking of the whole question, Mr. Mackay said he was content that I should tell the world he adhered to every syllable he had ever written or uttered about the destitution in St. Kilda, and that but for the supplies sent by the "Hebridean," the islanders would all have been dead men. He repeated this statement with great emphasis, and asked that I should make it known to the world. With reference to the complete failure of crops in the island, the clergyman mentioned that

all the potatoes lifted from the manse glebe, which is as big as any two crofts, only filled a single pail. By way, I suppose, of corroboration, the housekeeper came into the room at the moment and held up to my face a small dirty wooden vessel, saying something in Gaelic which I did not understand.

Mr. Mackay before I left was at considerable pains to make clear the warm friendship he entertained for me. He at least convinced me of the great curiosity he felt in my private affairs. For instance, I had to satisfy him whether I had a wife, whether I had a large salary, and on a good many matters besides, which one who does not go to confession is supposed to be allowed to keep to himself. I verily believed he was about to put me through my facings in the Shorter Catechism and the Claim of Right, and to ask my views on infant baptism. However, he drew the line at theology, and I thought myself lucky. Having lit his black pipe, the minister reverted with much unction to the never-failing subject of "Sir Collins." He was very curious to know whether Sir William was a member of Parliament, and he did not conceal his surprise and disappointment when I answered in the negative. He had never heard a word of Mr. Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule, and I can convey no idea of the surprise the good old man gave expression to when he learned of the Government's Irish measures. Mr. Mackay said he

was a Liberal, but he had always considered Mr. Gladstone was not fit to be trusted with the Government of the country.

I met Mr. Mackay again in the evening, when he came out to look at plans for a proposed harbour which the factor had prepared. The Reverend gentleman seemed then in excellent spirits, although suffering, as he told us, from a derangement of the liver. There was nothing, however, to cause anxiety, and we left him apparently in his usual health. At two o'clock next day the most hideous howling was set up in the village, and the cause was explained to be that the minister was dying. I ran down to the manse, and there I witnessed a most extraordinary scene. In the room where I had conversed with him the day before lay the poor old man, racked with pain, and, to all appearance, sinking fast. He was not able to speak, and some of us believed that to all intents we were already standing in the presence of death. A blubbing crowd of women filled the stuffy little room, their loud wailing being like nothing I ever heard or saw before, and the filthy stench suggesting a dunghill. Loudest in her lamentations was the housekeeper. Among the others present was a poor old, broken-hearted looking creature whom I had not seen before, and whom we were told was the minister's sister. In popular phraseology, she had to content herself with a back

seat in presence of the housekeeper. Most of the women in the room were tearing their hair. All of them were giving expression to their feelings in the vocabulary of grief in which the Gaelic language is so rich. Most frequent of all, I could distinguish the expressive exclamation, *Och mar tha mise*, which may be translated into the English, Alas, me! Addressing me as I entered the room, the housekeeper said, "*Bha e air a mharbhadh leis na naigheachdan anns a phaipeir*" ("He was killed by the news in the paper"). She added that she wished the vessel had not come, it had brought such bad news. The noise in the sick-room increasing, the factor called peremptorily for silence. How could she be quiet? the housekeeper asked. She had known the minister for twenty years, and what was to become of her now? Still she was considerate enough to take off her heavy clamping boots, but at the same time I could not but notice that she more than made up for the lessened noise on the uncarpeted floor by the louder cackling of her rough, unmusical tongue, particularly when she fell tooth and nail upon a poor old crone who had dared to fall asleep.

The surroundings were not suited for the chamber of death, and some of us took it upon ourselves to clear the room. Remedies were bethought of, and the housekeeper, without consulting any one, hurried to

administer a rough-and-ready cure of her own devising. She took a handful of oatmeal, and stirred it into a sort of brose, pouring in a glass of port wine to make the dish a little less gruesome. The poor old man, now quite beyond the power of speech, was pillowed up in bed, while his uncouth nurse attempted to pour the disgusting mixture down his throat, as one would feed a blackbird. I remonstrated, but it was no use, the housekeeper would have her way. Fortunately the minister was not choked, and the nurse, elated at the success of her barbarous doctoring, in about ten minutes afterwards must needs repeat it. Again she was successful, and for a third time within the space of half an hour was the frail old minister dosed with the horrid stuff. Nature revolted against such shocking treatment, and the result was a violent fit of vomiting. It was now high time to interfere, and some of us took the case into our own hands. We administered such restoratives as were to be had, and fortunately Mr. Mackenzie had brought a supply with him. On quitting the sick chamber none of us expected the old man would survive many hours. By this time all the people on the island were crowded within the manse. I counted eighteen in the kitchen alone. They were mostly women, and were squatted like squaws upon the cold clay floor. Every one was protesting that the newspapers had killed their parson. There was a fire-place but no

grate, and a fire of turf was burning on the hearth-stone.

At night the minister was no better, and nobody expected he would see the morning. On Saturday, however, he rallied a little, and was able to speak, but on Sunday he was again worse. At a hurried consultation held after the forenoon service, Mr. Mackenzie proposed to send his vessel to North Uist for a doctor. The proposal was a very generous one, and those of us who were consulted cordially approved of it. Mr. Mackay himself, however, objected, and it was agreed in deference to his wish to do nothing for another day to see whether he would improve. He did improve, although his progress was slow and was attended by one or two slight relapses. He had so far recovered by Thursday, the 17th, as to be able to speak to me about the condition of things in the island at the time of the destitution in 1885, and he informed me that the islanders proposed to hold a council, so he termed it, as soon as the eight men returned from Boreray, in order that their reputation and his own might be established in the eyes of the world.

Mr. Mackay's illness gave rise to the most intense excitement among the islanders. They went about denouncing the newspapers for having caused the trouble, and the men did no work for several days. The discharging of the vessel was further kept back

by the weather, which was very unfavourable. On Tuesday, the 15th, a severe storm visited the island, the wind blowing from the west. The men on board the smack lying out in the bay signalled to be taken ashore. There was a heavy swell on the sea at the time, but the men were landed successfully, leaving the tight little vessel to her fate. Fortunately she had splendid qualities for riding out a storm, and this she did. She was again taken possession of next day, when the storm having completely abated a start was made in putting the cargo ashore. The islanders, who do not know what steady, constant work is, did good service on Thursday, but on Friday morning they were casting about for an excuse to spend the day in idleness. This they readily found. The yacht of an English gentleman, a Mr. Henry Evans, steamed into the bay, and by general consent a holiday was proclaimed. Not a hand's turn was done all day. Mr. Evans on a previous visit had promised the islanders some herring nets, in order that they might prosecute the fishing, and this promise he now fulfilled. The nets were set that very night, but no fish were caught.

Mr. Mackay continued to improve during the last few days of our stay on the island, and on Saturday, the 19th, he was well enough to make a statement regarding the destitution and Mr. M'Neil's report thereupon. He showed me a copy of the letter he

forwarded to Dr. Rainy. Mr. Mackay pointed out to me that all he asked in this letter was seed corn, barley, and potatoes, the crops of which were completely destroyed. Continuing his statement to me, he said—"I think the people could have made a shift during the winter by living on fulmars, solan geese, and other birds, and by eating their sheep; but they would have run out of meal in about three months. At the time of Mr. M'Neill's visit we had only sixteen bolls, exclusive of the nineteen sent by the 'Hebridean.' Mr. M'Neill's statement that the people do not make meal largely out of their own corn is not correct. They do grind corn to a considerable extent in proportion to the produce of the crop. Mr. M'Neill's further statement about the potato crop is also incorrect. The potatoes were injured by disease before the storm, and the whole crop was certainly under the average. In my letter to Dr. Rainy there was no mention of meal or provisions of any kind, but at the same time we were very badly off for them. To show you how things stood, I may mention that I myself bought fifteen stones of meal out of the factor's store since spring; and had the 'Hebridean' meal not come, I would not have been able to get an ounce of that, as the meal in the island would all have been consumed long before. As to Mr. M'Neill's statement about the islanders having at least £20 each family laid past, I have to say that some of

them are very poor. How could they have so much money when they are so deeply in debt to the factor? I think a good many of them are in debt. One is £7 or £8 in debt. If the people had been forced to live during the winter on fulmars and other birds, as Mr. M'Neill seems to think they might have done, it would have caused the death of some of them. Even in good times they have too little vegetable food. If the people on the mainland sent any food by the 'Hebridean' it was on their own responsibility. I did not ask any, but at the same time I think it was needed, and that had it not come the people would have been very ill off, and many of them would possibly have died before the vessel came on the usual date—the 1st of June. The people are getting poorer every year owing to having to buy so much meal, and the price of cattle, which they sell, being so low."

One of the old men of the island, named Malcolm M'Donald, was present while the minister made this statement. In reply to questions put by Mr. Mackay, this man stated that the previous year's potato crop was of an inferior quality—much worse than the crop of 1884. They always used, he said, to grind some corn, but the previous year, owing to the storm, they had none. The people, he continued, were giving thanks to the Lord for His having put it into men's hearts to make such provision for that

solitary island. They could not sufficiently express their thankfulness to the good people who sent them the provisions by the "Hebridean." They had no means of living but for what was sent. No doubt they had a few sheep, but how long would these have served without meal, and then they would have been eating all they possessed. Both this man and the minister alluded to the fact that one of the letters despatched from St. Kilda imploring help, was written by a boy named Alexander Ferguson, aged thirteen. It was the first to arrive on the mainland, and it represented the people of St. Kilda as being in immediate want of food. This was a falsehood, and all the people on the island, both men said, were sorry that such a letter should have been sent. It was not known whether the boy sent the letter with the knowledge of his parents. The father of the boy, I may interpolate, is an elder in Mr. Mackay's congregation.

At the close of the interview, the minister dictated to me the following unique sentence:—"The people on the island are highly indebted to Dr. Rainy and to Sir Collins, publisher, Glasgow, for collecting so much money to enable them to send a supply, and we are obliged to Sir Collins for having co-operated with Dr. Rainy." He added that he hoped Sir William Collins and the other gentlemen who had subscribed would see that the people on the island

were actually needing a supply of seed corn, potatoes, and barley. As to meal, he made no mention of it in his letter, but he held it likewise was needed. Mr. Mackay also asked me to convey the thanks of the islanders to the editor of the *Glasgow Herald* for his having taken such a deep interest in their welfare, as well as to all the subscribers to the relief fund.

This interview took place on Saturday, the 19th. The day following, as on the Sunday previous, Mr. Mackay's recovery was prayed for in church, one of the elders who led the devotions beseeching the Almighty to exterminate their minister's spiritual and temporal enemies. The congregation, as a rule, joined with much fervour in the services, but one old woman was observed to be asleep. The elder stopped short and publicly reprov'd the woman, for whom, he said, there would be no sleep in the next world. The woman would probably be excommunicated, that being how they deal with sleepers in church in St. Kilda.

Mr. Mackay, who is a native of Jeantown, Ross-shire, and is turned seventy, has been pastor of the island since October, 1865. Never once since his appointment has he been off the island. His yearly stipend is £80. There can be no manner of doubt that for much of the unhealthy moral atmosphere pervading the island at present the ecclesiastical

authority in the person of Mr. Mackay is mainly responsible. The weak-minded pope and prime-minister rolled into one who rules the destinies of the island has reduced religion into a mere hypocritical formalism, finding no place in his creed for self-reliance or any of the manlier virtues. Men are enjoined to two hours devotions every week day, and eight on Sunday, when they must also wear a sad face and speak an octave under their usual voice. Whistling and singing are at all times tabooed, and not to comply is to be accounted an infidel, and worse than a heathen. The apostle of this novel evangel has no stomach for the common affairs of life. He has enervated the islanders by arrogating to himself all power, temporal as well as spiritual, and with this influence, which might have been directed to the most useful ends, Mr. Mackay has only sought to enforce a fantastical sacerdotalism. It is nothing to Mr. Mackay whether the poor people starve their crofts or neglect the fishing so long as his own silly fads are observed. There is no use blinking the fact that during the twenty years the Reverend gentleman has held the island in his firm grip no useful public work of any kind has been executed. We know something of what he might have succeeded in doing. At every point in the island one comes upon evidences of the practical usefulness of a former minister, the Rev. Neil Mackenzie,

under whose beneficent guidance the St. Kildians appear to have put forth some energy to improve their condition. That, however, was in the good old days of cakes and ale, before the Disruption, when whistling was not as yet a sin, and when fiddling and piping, and even dancing, were not unknown in St. Kilda.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT THE PEOPLE.

THANKS, mainly, to the paternal rule of the Rev. John Mackay, the St. Kildians of to-day, after a good many years regular intercourse with the world, are still in many ways a "peculiar people." When five-and-twenty years ago, one of Her Majesty's gun-boats anchored off the island, it was accounted a curious fact, illustrating a singular phase of human nature, that the St. Kildians expected to be paid for their trouble in accepting the captain's kind invitation to go on board and look at the vessel's machinery and armaments. It is said they actually refused to leave the vessel unless they got payment. To-day, Mr. Mackay's lengthened ministrations notwithstanding, the people have notions about the laws of wages and property quite as crude, if sometimes a little more cunningly disclosed. Only last summer

some of the people declined to sit to a photographer without being first paid for their services.

Their notions on this subject often take an aggressive form. Every strange vessel that enters the Bay of St. Kilda is expected to pay toll to the islanders, and a hamper for the minister is never reckoned out of place. If you are ignorant of the custom, or do not feel disposed to comply with it, you are speedily beseiged with beggars who remind you of it, and have no compunction in proposing to relieve you of everything you are simple-minded enough to part with, from a smoke of tobacco or a lead pencil to a hamper of wines. When you go ashore the begging nuisance becomes intensified, and no matter how generous you are you need not expect much gratitude. Give a man a sovereign for an hour's work in scaling the rocks, and he will tell you that he once got five for a similar performance. A few years ago a certain noble Duke visited the island on his way to Iceland, and made the islanders a handsome present of provisions. No sooner was the nobleman's yacht out of the bay than the islanders began to talk contemptuously of the gift, which, they remarked, was altogether disproportionate to "such a big man and such a big ship." Within the past few months a really fine present of surgical appliances has been thrown aside in the same derisive fashion. A few years back this singular people

chopped one of their boats into firewood. The boat was a gift from people in the South, and on the islanders being remonstrated with on the enormity of their conduct they coolly replied that the boat did not quite suit their purpose, and they had made up their mind to burn it, so that their kind friends in the South might have a chance of giving them a better one.

During my stay on the island there was much commotion over the visit of the yacht of Mr. Evans, who had on previous occasions been lavish in his benefactions. A present of herring nets at least was expected, for so much had been promised. The herring nets were forthcoming, and so was the customary hamper for the minister, who, poor man, stood sorely in need of a few delicacies, but beyond these there was nothing save a severe reproof to the islanders for the begging ways into which they have fallen. The islanders did not conceal their chagrin, for they had been counting upon something more pleasing to the palate than herring nets. All this betrays the unfortunate lack of independence and self-respect which has come to be identified with the nature of these poor islanders, and many more facts could be adduced in the same direction. Yachtsmen and tourists by the Glasgow steamers have contributed to the result, but the man mainly responsible is the head of the community, who appears to dis-

courage the unfortunate proclivities of the people by neither precept nor example.

Martin, who sang the virtues of the St. Kildians as he found them in 1697, lays stress upon the absence of avarice in the character of the people. This was considered worth alluding to in the tremendously long title of his book—I quote from the edition of 1753—“A voyage to St. Kilda, the remotest of all the Hebrides or Western Isles of Scotland; giving an account of the very remarkable inhabitants of that place, their beauty and singular chastity; . . . their extensive charity; their contempt of gold and silver as below the dignity of human nature,” &c.

Before you have long set foot on St. Kilda you discover that there is a species of socialism firmly rooted among the people. Very likely you have brought with you some presents for the islanders, and, if you have consulted their well-known tastes, these are sure to include tobacco and confections. You are at once asked bluntly for both—the men begging the one luxury, and the women the other. To discover the socialistic principle you have only to toss a roll of tobacco—an ounce will serve the purpose as well—to the first man that accosts you. True to the apostolic theory of “all things common” this latter-day Ananias will share his spoil, to the last leaf, with every smoker on the island. There

are twelve smokers, I learned, including the Rev. Mr. Mackay, and one old woman, and the dividing of the eleemosynary tobacco is often the cause of much bickering and strife. However, notwithstanding the strongly-marked cunning and greed of the islanders, it is said that the division of such gifts is always carried out honestly. For some dark reason, patent, perhaps, to the female mind, Sapphira is less conscientious than Ananias, and so far as I could make out, she never invites any one to help her in putting a pound of confections out of sight. Here the strain is too great for the socialistic principle to bear, as it also is in other circumstances, particularly at the dividing of exceptionally handsome presents.

In some of their vocations, however, some of these poor people are socialists out and out. Take, for instance, bird-catching. Let me explain how the socialistic principle is carried into practice in this—the principal industry on the island. Every year before the nesting season begins the islanders divide the rocks where the fulmar breeds into sixteen portions, and these are allocated by lot, one falling to each of the sixteen crofts on the island. The fulmar is, of course, the principal bird of St. Kilda, and the one with which the island is identified. It is the business of each crofter to look after the portion of the rocks which he has been allotted. Assisted by his family, he acts as a kind of policeman, being particularly

careful that the birds are in no way molested. His special aversion is a fowling-piece, which cannot be tolerated near the nesting-ground for one moment. The sheep, too, have to be kept from disturbing the birds. When August comes round the young fulmar is killed, and though each crofter is specially entrusted with his own particular bit of rock, getting whatever assistance he requires from the others, the total produce is shared equally among the happy sixteen. The feathers are the most valuable part of the bird, and these are scrupulously divided. Less value is put upon the carcasses, because they are so plentiful and are not marketable. It therefore happens that the few unlucky people, like the minister, who are excluded from the Ali Baba syndicate of sixteen, find little difficulty in getting a hand at the deal of the fulmar carcasses. These are preserved for use during the winter, and salted fulmar is a delicacy which you may have served up to you along with your porridge even at the manse.

In fishing, too, the St. Kildians are socialists. As a rule, two boats of six men each go out to the fishing, and here again the produce is divided among the lucky sixteen. There are strong and willing men outside the charmed number, but they must stand aside in favour of the elect. It is enough to make an infidel believe in predestination. Even Mr. Mackay, although he perhaps never handled an oar in his life,

has as strong a claim, one would imagine, to a share in the spoil as several of the sixteen, yet never a fin goes his way. All this may be apostolic socialism or communism, but it appears to be not far removed from the grossest selfishness, and tyranny and oppression of the weak. After fifteen days' stay on St. Kilda I came to the deliberate conclusion that this nibbling at socialism is responsible for a good deal of the moral chaos which has so completely engulfed the islanders. It certainly has done not a little to cripple the fishing industry. The four presentation boats which the islanders now possess are simply going to wreck in their hands, and one apparent reason is that they are common property. What is everybody's business is nobody's business, and so the boats are allowed to lie and rot uncared for on the beach. When next a begging letter comes for another boat the subscribing public should impose certain conditions with their gift. If a boat is ever given again it should be presented, not to the community, but to half-a-dozen of the most deserving members. However, if Mr. M'Neill's estimate of the wealth of the people is correct, there is no reason why they should not buy their own boats for the future.

But the fishing industry is crippled in another and somewhat singular way. A prayer meeting is held in the church every Wednesday evening, and

not only is attendance regarded as practically compulsory on all, but the couple of hours' time during which it continues, has come to be looked upon as little less sacred than the Sabbath itself. Work is entirely suspended. Even for the fisherman at sea there is no respite. He must come into port and lay up his boat till the meeting is over. The practical effect of this extraordinary fanaticism is that fishing boats do not go out on the evenings of Tuesday or Wednesday. They dare not go out on Saturday or Sunday, and so it comes to this that the St. Kilda fisherman has but three nights in the week on which he can possibly ply his calling. Mr. Mackay puts his veto on four; the weather has the disposal of only three. Not knowing the custom of the islanders I proposed one of the two Wednesday evenings I spent on St. Kilda to go out fishing in a small boat. I was told that to go out before nine p.m. would certainly bring down about my ears the severest reproofs of minister and people, who would look upon me as a heathen.

The population of the island at the date of my visit numbered 80. Since then there has been one death, thus reducing the total at the end of last summer to 79. In October, 1885, the population of St. Kilda was 78, and not 77, as stated by Mr. Malcolm M'Neill in his official report to the Board of Supervision, and since then there have been two

births. It seems to me probable that the slight error into which Mr. M'Neill fell in his enumeration arose from his overlooking the minister's housekeeper—a very unfortunate and also remarkable omission, considering the character and position of the woman. However, be that as it may, I was at some pains to satisfy myself that the following table of the population at the time of my visit is correct. The table deals only with the native population, which comprises 22 families. There being only 16 crofts and as many crofters' houses, it follows that in some cases two families live in one house, and presumably also share one croft, for sub-division is an evil that seems inevitably to grow up part and parcel with the crofter system. It will be noticed that there is one cottar, the woman M'Crimmon, who appears to be the last of her race on the island. Deducting this woman, who lives by herself in the only one of the old huts now occupied, it would appear that the number of sub-divisions is five, these representing sons and sons-in-law, who have married and settled under the paternal roof. Of course the Rev. John Mackay is a crofter too, as ministers in such communities generally are, and his stock of this world's gear is not inconsiderable, enabling him as it does largely to supplement the scanty allowance of £80 which he draws yearly from the resources of the Free Church. For the reason stated Mr. Mackay

is not included in the following table, while his housekeeper, who is a native, figures obscurely as a unit in her father's family:—

Crofters.	Adults.		Children.		Total.
	Male.	Female.	Male.	Female.	
Donald M'Donald, . . .	1	2	1	...	4
John Gillies, jun., . . .	1	1	...	...	2
Widow Gillies, . . .	...	2	...	...	2
Malcolm M'Kinnon, . . .	2	1	...	...	3
Norman Gillies, . . .	1	1	1	2	5
John Gillies, sen., . . .	1	2	...	1	4
Donald M'Quien, . . .	1	1	2	2	6
Malcolm M'Donald, . . .	2	2	3	1	8
John M'Donald, jun. (blind), .	2	4	...	...	6
Rory Gillies, . . .	2	2	2	...	6
Angus Gillies, . . .	1	1	1	...	3
Donald Ferguson, . . .	1	2	3	...	6
Neil Ferguson, . . .	1	3	...	...	4
Finlay Gillies, sen., . . .	1	2	...	1	4
John M'Donald, sen., . . .	2	2	1	...	5
Lachlan M'Kinnon, Cottar, .	2	3	1	1	7
Rachael M'Crimmon, . . .	...	1	...	...	1
	21	32	15	8	76

An analysis of the above table brings out the following totals of the five different surnames by which the islanders are called:—M'Crimmon, 1; M'Quien, 6; Ferguson, 10; M'Kinnon, 10; M'Donald, 23; Gillies, 26. The surnames of M'Leod and Morrison once figured among the islanders, but they disappeared before 1861. The table also brings out the fact that the male and female native inhabitants

stand in the proportion of 36 and 40—quite a decent proportion considering the occupations of the people, although no doubt a little unfortunate for the sex in this case numerically the stronger. A closer analysis, however, brings out a state of matters not at all satisfactory. The adult females number just about 50 per cent. more than the adult males, while the boys of school age and under are within one of doubling the number of girls. This complete disproportion between the sexes is to be accounted for chiefly by the heavy infantile mortality. It may possibly be the means at no distant date of breaking up to some extent the absolute exclusiveness which the St. Kildians have pursued for hundreds of years in marrying and giving in marriage.

Continuing a little further this analysis of the numerical relation of the sexes, some additional particulars may be given. The number of marriageable women on the island is in excess of the native requirements. That, indeed, may be inferred from the figures given above. It is, of course, a somewhat delicate point to determine when a woman passes out of the interesting period of eligibility for marriage. Perhaps the fairest way is to take the opinion of the woman herself, and going by that rule, the list of marriageable women in St. Kilda must be headed by that ubiquitous person, the minister's housekeeper. I shall be gallant enough to withhold the lady's age,

but I may say without offence that she is on the wrong side of forty. The lady herself, Miss Ann M'Donald, cannot object to being told so. Starting with her, I find that the number of women of 40 and over, is two; at each of the ages of 36, 35, and 23 there is one, and there are two just 21—total, 7. The marriageable men are three in number, aged respectively 40 (widower), 24, and 26. There is also a boy of 17, whom I have some difficulty in classifying. In St. Kilda, where husbands are scarce, he appears to be considered eligible for marriage.

As stated above, the number of children of school age and under is 23. The number attending school is 15. Under school age there are 8 children—6 boys and 2 girls. The girls are both about 4 years, and the ages of the boys are as follows:—One about 3, two between 1 and 2, and three under 1 year.

Cases of longevity in St. Kilda are rare. This is possibly to be accounted for by the frequent inter-marriage of the islanders. Considering the natural advantages of the island, and the fact that weak members of the species are probably weeded out by the terrible infantile lock-jaw, the people are shorter lived than might be reasonably expected. All the same, many of them outrun the allotted span, but at seventy they are frail, old creatures, as old-looking as some men at ninety in similar communities. The

following are the names and ages of a few of the oldest islanders, the top age, as will be observed, being 81 :—Widow Gilles, 81 ; Finlay Gillies, sen., 80 ; John M'Donald, sen., and his wife, 79 each ; Neil Ferguson, 78 ; Malcolm M'Donald, 76 ; Lachlan M'Kinnon, 76 ; Mrs. Neil Ferguson, 72 ; Mrs. Finlay Gillies, sen., 72 ; John M'Donald (blind), John Gillies, sen., and Rory Gillies, 70.

CHAPTER V.

MORE ABOUT THE PEOPLE.

THE greater portion of the St. Kildians are of a fair complexion, and this is taken to indicate an admixture of Scandinavian blood with the Celtic, which is also represented. When or how the island was first peopled is not known, but the islanders themselves have a tradition that their ancestors came from Uist, and they also believe that the island has been more than once depopulated. Both Scandinavian and Celt, it may be taken for granted, are present in the race of to-day, and in this respect they are in no wise different from the inhabitants of many of the Western Islands. Writers from the days of Martin downwards are nearly at one in extolling the beauty of the women, the strength and healthiness of both sexes,

the brightness of their eyes, and the whiteness and soundness of their teeth. Owing, however, to the nature of their food there is a tendency among the people to stoutness, and in the case of the women this somewhat detracts from the pleasing effect of fresh-looking, rosy complexions. The average height of twenty-one male adults measured by Mr. Sands was about 5 feet 6 inches—the tallest being 5 feet 9 inches and the shortest 4 feet 10½ inches. As regards weight the islanders are certainly over the national average.

The dress of the St. Kildians differs little now-days from that of similar communities in other parts of the West Highlands. In Martin's time (1697) the *breacon an fheili* or belted plaid, then common in the Highlands, was worn, but there were people still living who had worn a habit of sheepskin, the ancient dress of the islanders. The men of to-day wear jackets, vests, and trousers of their own making, mostly of a coarse, bluish cloth, which they weave in the winter months. The glengarry bonnet is generally worn. The women's dresses are also mostly home-made, dyed a kind of blue and brown mixture, and are not unlike common wincey. On Sundays most of the women wear a Rob Roy tartan plaid usually fastened by an ancient-looking brooch. The head dress of the women on week-days is a turkey-red cotton napkin, which gives the wearer a picturesque appearance. On Sundays the older females generally

wear the common white muslin cap or *match*. The wearing of stockings and boots is becoming more fashionable, though the women still all go barefoot on week-days in summer. The women's dresses are made by the men.

In the previous chapter I mentioned boiled fulmar as an article of diet with the St. Kildians. Besides the flesh of the fulmar, they eat puffins, solan geese, and other seabirds, a little mutton, potatoes, and oat-meal. The following list of the ordinary diet of the people was supplied to me by one of the men:—

Breakfast.—Porridge and milk, with the flesh of the fulmar afterwards occasionally, the bird being boiled in the porridge.

Dinner.—Mutton, or the flesh of the fulmar or solan goose, with potatoes when there are any.

Tea.—Tea and bread and cheese, the flesh of the fulmar occasionally, and sometimes porridge.

The islanders take breakfast between nine and ten; dinner generally not till about four, and sometimes an hour or two later, on their return from the rocks or the fields; and tea about nine in summer, and as late as eleven in winter, when they sit up at their looms till about two in the morning. There is a complete absence of variety in their food. This, along with the lack of fresh vegetables and the indigestible nature of the flesh of the birds which they eat, is a frequent cause of dyspepsia, from which

many of the islanders suffer. Milk and sea-birds' eggs are consumed in considerable quantities during the summer; tea, sugar, and flour are now used in nearly every house; potatoes are the only vegetables procurable—the quantity grown on the island is small and the quality bad, and the supply is only available usually for six months. It therefore follows that the dietary of the people is practically devoid of vegetables for the half of each year. Such condiments as vinegar, pepper, mustard, and pickles are not used. Whisky is relished very much, and every man keeps his bottle, but nobody drinks to excess. On the whole, the people live well; all that is wanted is a greater variety and more vegetable food. A Skyeman, who had been often on the island for various lengths of time, gave me his opinion in these terms—"They are the best fed people in creation. I speak the truth, master."

The occupations of the people have already been indicated. Every man follows five or six distinct callings. He is at once crofter, cragsman, fisherman, weaver, tailor, and cobbler. It is only necessary, in this chapter, to speak of the St. Kildian as a weaver. His loom is in operation for only about two months of the year, when the nights are at their longest and out-door work is suspended. The loom is set up in one of the two apartments into which every house is divided, generally the kitchen. It is a primitive-

looking machine, every portion of it home-made, and displaying much ingenuity and dexterity. The most heterogeneous and unpromising materials have been utilised. A little bit of timber thrown up on the shore has been scooped with a pocket-knife into a shuttle; for a spindle there is the quill of a goose, and a bobbin has been shaped out of the stalk of a common weed—the *dockin*!

For two months the sound of the shuttle is heard in nearly every house. The work is carried on with astonishing zeal, the men often sleeping in their clothes, and sometimes for but a few hours each night. The dawn of day finds them at the loom, which they do not leave till an hour or two past midnight. It is the same every winter. This period of unremitting toil is often put forward to prove the industry of the people and to refute assertions which have been made to the contrary effect. It certainly proves the capacity of the people for work, but it leaves untouched the fact that for the greater portion of the year the St. Kildians, either from the absence of incentive or the lack of a willing mind, do not make the best possible use of their time. Of course it is much the same in all similar communities.

The St. Kildians of to-day have no sports or amusements of any kind. How changed is everything since the days of Martin, when the people played the Jews harp which “disposed them to dance mightily;”

and when also they brewed an ale which likewise "when drunk plentifully disposes them to dance merrily!" Then also, and possibly in much more recent times, the islanders were very much given to the game of "shinty," but Mr. Mackay, and very likely some of the stern catechists who preceded him, have abolished all that. All games and amusements are now forbidden as sinful, whistling and the singing of secular music are regarded as too frivolous and carnal for rational men and women, and as for dancing it would be a breach of Mr. Mackay's code even to name it. Innocent and instructive games like draughts are regarded as traps of the devil to lead unwary souls astray, and the introduction of a draught-board into the island would assuredly be visited with a heavy penalty. In the same way a book of Scottish songs has before now been suppressed. How was it possible for the ancient customs of the island, racy of Druidism or Paganism some of them, to survive under the iron heel of this grinding and petty tyranny? Very few have survived. The people still have their *mòd* or Parliament, but all the festivals are no more. New year's day they celebrate with a service in church—and by the by they still cling to the old style of reckoning time—but the altar on *Mullach-geal*, where sacrifices were made to the god of the seasons, is a thing of the past.

St. Kilda enjoys the blessings of Home Rule. The

mòd is a council or Parliament of all the men in the island. It meets almost every morning, the place of meeting being in front of one or other of the houses, just as circumstances draw the men together. The *mòd* settles all the business of the little commonwealth. Often the proceedings are anything but harmonious, and the loud talking of the men at one and the same moment is suggestive of anything but a peaceful solution. However, when a decision is arrived at the malcontents readily give way, and co-operate cordially with the majority. The *mòd* it is that divides the rocks for fowling, and the subjects which come before it usually relate to bird-catching, fishing, and the like. Shall we fish to-day? or catch solan geese? are examples of the questions which occupy the *mòd*.

I was favoured with an account of the present marriage customs of the St. Kildians, as seen for himself, by an intelligent eye-witness, Mr. Hugh M'Callum, the late schoolmaster on the island. Three Sabbaths before the interesting ceremony the banns are proclaimed in church by one of Mr. Mackay's elders. A week before the marriage day a repast consisting of the chief luxuries of the island is provided for the whole of the islanders in the bridegroom's house. The "luxuries" include tea—which is drunk out of bowls—cheese, butter, Scotch bannocks, and last, but not least, "a wee drappie

o't." But, added my informant, the islanders are "moderates" of the best kind, and they never disgrace such feasts with drunkenness. Their Gaelic word for this little affair is *reitich*, meaning contract, and it corresponds with a custom once common in other parts of Scotland known as the "bottling." A curious feature of the gathering is that the sexes are kept by themselves in different parts of the house. For the comfort of the people, tables and chairs are provided, and in the event of the supply running short the women have to remain standing. The "feast" is, of course, a most funereal affair. What else could it be when the Pope of the place has forbidden even singing and whistling? There is no singing, and, of course, no dancing. The time is passed in general remarks on the coming event and the "news of the day." My informant is responsible for the phrase. I really do not know what the "news of the day" means in St. Kilda, unless it be that Mòr Bhàn was publicly reprovèd in church the Sunday before for sleeping, or that the minister's housekeeper has patched up her latest quarrel with the prettiest woman on the island (commonly called the Queen), making use of her rather weak-minded master as an ambassador of peace.

When the wedding-day comes everybody gathers into the church, including the bride and bridegroom, attended by the best-man and bridesmaid. They

are rigged out in their Sunday finery, and are privileged with a front seat to the left of the pulpit. Everybody is agog with excitement, for the occasion is a great one. Soon there enters the Rev. Mr. Mackay, Bible in hand. Mounting the precentor's box the minister engages in a Gaelic prayer. Then follows a sermon on the duties of husband and wife. The sermon over, Mr. Mackay goes through the marriage ceremony in the orthodox fashion. There is another prayer, and then the curtain falls. After the marriage a right jolly feast is provided in one of the houses in the village, but to this, with a peculiar exclusiveness, only natives are invited. The "strangers," who include the schoolmaster, the old nurse, and the minister himself, hie themselves to the manse, where they attempt to make merry in a humble kind of way, and the newly-married couple are gracious enough to look in for a minute or two and smile upon the proceedings. The husband and wife bring provisions with them, generally mutton, it being considered unlucky that they should come empty-handed. Tea is supplied in great abundance by the housekeeper, who has opinions of her own on the subject of tea-drinking. A bumper is drunk to the health and prosperity of the newly-wedded pair, and this formality over the company breaks up. The couple are seen to rest for the night, and the event is at an end.

There is a difficulty usually about the honeymoon. It is the correct thing to spend it from home, but there is only the choice of going to a friend's house ten yards off, or one twice the distance. These poor St. Kildians ape some of our Southern fashions rather funnily, and with a happy ignorance that they are masquerading in a dress which only makes them look ridiculous. They surpass themselves in this affair of the honeymoon. Few of them have the native simplicity of a couple who were married shortly before my visit, and of whom it is not possible to speak but with approbation. They spent the honeymoon in their own house, going about their usual callings. The very first day both were on the top of the house thatching the roof. But there are proprieties to be observed even in St. Kilda, and public opinion asserted itself pretty strongly on what was regarded as a violation of the rules of polite society. Even at the time of my visit the conduct of the thatcher and his wife was still a kind of scandal.

Marriage in St. Kilda was at one time a much more serious affair than it is even now, when there is the Rev. John Mackay to denounce singing, dancing, and the "sinfu' little fiddle." In those days a young St. Kildian who wished to make one of the fair maids of the island his own was required to accomplish a most dangerous feat in order to prove possibly

the sincerity of his love, but, more probably, his ability to support a wife. Away in the south-west corner of the island, overlooking Soa, there is the Lover's or Mistress' Stone, the lofty pinnacle of a perpendicular precipice upwards of 200 feet in height. The top is sacred to the guillemots, who congregate undisturbed in hundreds. It is called the Stac Biorach, meaning the sharp-pointed stack or rock. The aspirant to the hand of a fair St. Kildian had to climb this giddy, dangerous height, and, planting his left heel on the outer edge, with the sole of his foot entirely unsupported, he extended his right leg forward beyond the other and grasped the foot with both hands, holding it long enough to satisfy his own and the lady's friends gathered below—thus giving a very forcible illustration of the proverb, "Faint heart never won fair lady." When I looked up at the giddy eminence, and was invited by the islanders to prove my gallantry, I was disposed to say with a previous writer on St. Kilda that the result of the attempt would probably be the loss of both life and mistress at the same moment.

The islanders of to-day are themselves sad cowards in this same respect. And, indeed, the hazardous ordeal has been quite done away with, for the reason, I was told, that the young women nowadays are only too glad to take the first offer they get whether or not the suitor be willing to risk his life in proving

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the strength of his love and his proficiency as a bird-catcher. *Tempora mutantur.* There are only a few men on the island who can now manage the dangerous feat. One of them who did it lately and got safely back said he would never try it again. It does not appear, however, that any fatal accidents have occurred at this particular spot, at least for a long time back. The explanation is that in climbing such rocks, where accidents are always to be feared, very great care is taken by the islanders. The accidents nearly always happen where they are least expected and when, consequently, the usual precautions against them are not taken.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE "SAWBATH" IS KEPT.

IF you are thoughtless enough or wicked enough to forget that it is Sunday when you open your eyes in St. Kilda on the first day of the week you are speedily reminded of the fact. And in a very forcible way, too. The Pope of the island is lord and master within your bedroom as well as without, and he it is who comes to tell you that the day is the Lord's. But how does he do it? You are a Sassenach, and therefore like your morning ablutions. Mr. Mackay

comes and says that this being Sunday you must not dare even to wash your hands. That is what it really amounts to. In his wisdom the Rev. gentleman has laid it down that it is sinful to draw water on the Lord's Day. Poor people do not usually have the resources of an army in the field compressed inside a room and kitchen. They do not, as a rule, possess tanks and cisterns and such like. Hence when Mr. Mackay lays down the hard and fast rule that the Sunday water must be put into bond, so to speak, on the Saturday night, he assuredly puts a severe embargo upon the quantity and upon the uses to which it is to be put.

If any man thinks differently let him spend a Sunday on the island. The first Sunday of my visit I was offered for the purposes of my toilet a little water in the bottom of a basin which, on the most liberal calculation, certainly did not exceed one of Mr. Bass's pints. "It's the Sawbath," was the laconic explanation of my old landlady, who was not a native of the island, and loved neither the islanders nor their ways. Then, with a profane leer, she told me of the minister's prohibition. At that moment I did not feel disposed to invoke blessings on Mr. Mackay's head; what I did do was to propose for once to become a Sabbath-breaker. But there was no need, for the good old soul, with a comic look in her face, pointed to a pitcher of water just

drawn from the well. "It's no alloo't," she said, "but whiles we draw a wee drap on the sly," I was thankful that one person at least had the courage to disobey the minister's ridiculous Sabbatarianism. Not one of the natives would dare do so, and the result is to be seen in the number of unwashed faces on the Lord's Day.

When you sit down to breakfast ten to one there is no milk or cream on the table. That was my experience. I had made a bargain the day of my arrival with one of the damsels of the place to supply me with milk during my stay at so much per week, but I was now informed that in St. Kilda the week only means six days—that the Sunday is carefully excluded from all such carnal contracts. Further, I was told that milk was not to be bought that day at any price. Here was Mr. Mackay again, a kind of resurrected Forbes Mackenzie, shutting up the drinking wells and milk shops. There is a saying to the effect that a wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse. Your St. Kildian has the advantage of the horse, inasmuch as he or she—especially the latter—can interpret the hidden meanings of both. Thus it was, that although I could not speak a word of Gaelic, I had no difficulty in circumventing Mr. Mackay's Sunday Closing Act. The good fairy—if such you can call a woman with ankles and feet like a rhinoceros, and who walked like that interesting

but inelegant animal—the good fairy brought the milk, which, however, she was careful to explain was a “present for the Sassenach;” but when the settling-day came her Sabbatarianism did not preclude her from expecting a present in return. Even the penal clauses of Mr. Mackay’s Act did not deter the poor woman from being a party to an agreement of this kind, and possibly every other person on the island could have been “got at” in the same way. So much for the success of Mr. Mackay’s Sabbatarian restrictions, and for the honesty with which they are observed.

After breakfast comes church. But the peculiar thing about church and church-going in St. Kilda is that nobody can tell you when the service begins. If, therefore, you are really anxious to wait upon Mr. Mackay’s ministrations take a lesson from the parable of the wise virgins, and be up betimes. That is the only safe course. If you would know the secret of this uncertainty it lies in the vagaries of the parson’s watch. The morning service begins at eleven o’clock—not according to Greenwich, but according to Mackay. That is the simple explanation. Now, the most precise and correct-living man, even though he be a parson, will occasionally omit to wind up his watch of a Saturday night, and, moreover, some men actually set their heart upon an irregular timekeeper. There is really no accounting for tastes.

Mr. Mackay himself, on the occasion of my first visit, told me that he liked his watch to be two hours ahead of the rest of the world. His watch at that time was just two hours in advance of the sun, and he assured me that the fact was a source of both pleasure and convenience to him. When he summoned the poor creatures to church it was only nine o'clock, but he was able to point to his watch and say it was eleven. It was impossible to contradict him, for there is but one timekeeper on the island.

On the present occasion nobody appeared to know the regulation time, and the minister, poor man, was too ill to be troubled about such carnal matters. It was, indeed, uncertain whether there would be any public service at all seeing the extremely critical state of Mr. Mackay's health, and having regard also to the fact that the best spokesman of the three elders was away doing duty on Boreray. Had the minister's housekeeper got her way there would have been no service. She sent round a sort of verbal circular urging that the ringing of the church bell and the singing of psalms in the church, which closely adjoins the manse, would be sure to do her patient harm. Possibly the housekeeper was only jealous of the minister's professional reputation. Mr. Mackay's sermons of late have not been giving satisfaction to all his hearers, and it may have occurred to the housekeeper's mind that it would be a serious thing

should one of the elders outshine the Rev. gentleman in his own pulpit. Pending the decision of a council of housekeeper and elders, the islanders held themselves in readiness, everybody remaining indoors. Precisely at half-past eleven, Greenwich time—twelve by the parson's watch, as I afterwards ascertained—somebody tapped the bell gently four times. Every door in the village flew open at one and the same moment, and forth issued a picturesque stream of men, women, and children. Everybody's steps were directed towards the church at the extreme south-east end of the village, and it was remarkable that the two sexes walked apart by themselves in little knots.

On approaching the church the first thing to attract your notice specially is the bell. It stands a few paces back from the church, suspended from a sort of gallows-like arrangement. Look closely at this bell, and you will bet your bottom dollar that it did not come out of the Sustentation Fund, or the Church Planting Fund, or whatever else is the name of the ecclesiastical machinery that supplies church bells. There is an inscription on the bell, simple yet eloquent—"Janet Cowan, 1861." Who was Janet Cowan? you ask. Some pious donor who took an interest in the island? Nothing of the sort. Janet Cowan was the name of a Greenock-owned ship which went on the rocks here in April, 1864, while on a voyage

from Calcutta to Dundee. The bell, albeit consecrated to better uses than sounding the watch to profane sailors, serves only to awaken your suspicions that you have dropped into a nest of pirates.

The church is a plain, barn-like building standing north-east and south-west. You enter by a door in the north-east gable. A bit of very rough causeway leads up the centre to the pulpit and precentor's box at the remote end. Other than this causeway, which is only the breadth of a narrow pavement, there is no floor to cover the cold, damp, black earth. Nine heavy coarse wooden benches without backs are placed on each side of the causeway, and these give ample accommodation for all the worshippers. Above your head are the bare rafters, with numberless spiders performing profane somersaults in the air while divine service is going on. On the white-washed walls of the building, now green and yellow with mildew and damp, and with great patches of lime constantly crumbling away, slimy and gruesome insects crawl lazily and indifferently along, one of the crowd every now and then alighting upon the shoulder of some devout worshipper.

At this particular service nearly all the men were dressed in trousers, coat, and vest, of a coarse home-made bluish cloth. One man wore an old felt hat; all the others had heavy glengarry bonnets. Two could each boast of a linen collar; the others wore the same sort of

muffler that they twist round their neck fold upon fold on week days and in all weathers. While the men without exception wore boots, the cruel inequality of the other sex was emphasised in the fact that the women, like the children, were barefoot. The women's dresses were of a coarse bluish cloth, resembling that worn by the men. Most of them had a Rob Roy tartan shawl, which was worn over their shoulders. They nearly all had the never failing Turkey-red napkin tied over the head, the married women having a *curachd* or "mutch" underneath, only the white fringe of which was visible. One woman was conspicuous from all the others. She was dressed just in the orthodox way, precisely as you may see a girl of the humbler class in any rural parish in the country. She had even a fashionable bonnet, but my technical knowledge does not permit me to say more than that the prevailing colours were blue and cream. To match her fashionable "rig" this woman of course wore boots, but in this respect she was alone of her sex. Let me here say that on Communion Sundays the women put on boots and finer dresses, and most of the men on the same occasions go the length of a white shirt.

The name of our preacher was Donald M'Donald. He is not an elder, but he is the most intelligent and sensible man on the island. The service was opened by the congregation singing in Gaelic the first four verses of the 25th Psalm. In the absence of the

precentor-beadle at Boreray, Donald had himself to lead the praise. The singing was got through in the last-century fashion, the conductor giving out line after line. I do not wish to be uncharitable but I state solemnly that I never before heard such a medley of discordant, incongruous sounds. I can compare it to nothing but the baying of a pack of hyenas. There was no tune—or rather every man had a tune for himself, and where two happened to be in the one key it was an accident. It pained one to be compelled to listen. Praise over, Donald engaged in prayer. He prayed with evident fervour for the space of twenty minutes, the women all the while groaning and sighing, just as other members of the emotional sex do at Salvation Army meetings. Then came what was to serve for a sermon—an exposition of the 10th chapter of Romans. In this task Donald held out for half an hour. Following this, we had other four verses of the 25th Psalm, a long Prayer from an elder in a back seat, two more verses of the same psalm, another prayer from a man in a front seat, and yet two more verses of the same favourite psalm. Then came the passing round of the hat, and afterwards we were at liberty to go. The women rose first and left the church in a body; the men followed by themselves at a respectful distance.

There was no intimation as to when the afternoon service was to begin. A very short interval was

allowed; then three or four taps on the bell and the faithful were together again. On this occasion Mr. Mackay's substitute had staying power sufficient to spin the service out to the legitimate two hours. Closely following this, there was a Sabbath school service, conducted by the schoolmaster. No sooner was it over than that singular bell was sounded once more, and again the entire population hurried to church. At the evening diet, which lasts generally till after eight, all the unmarried folks have to recite from memory one of the Psalms of David in rotation. On this particular Sunday the psalm to be repeated was the 107th—43 verses in length. Talk about a tax on bachelors! The thing is in operation in St. Kilda. A few men hold out as far as the 118th Psalm, but the 119th brings even the best of them down.

The following Sunday, Mr. Mackay being still laid aside, the preacher was one of the elders, Donald Ferguson, who had come back with the other men from Boreray only the night before. The people look upon this man as a great don in the pulpit, and Donald evidently has some notion of the same kind himself. Quite recently he took it upon himself to tell poor Mr. Mackay that unless he was going to make better sermons he had better look out for another job. Parsons do not like to be spoken to in this fashion, and Mr. Mackay kicked up a great

dust. The affair took place publicly in church at the close of divine service. It was no laughing matter, for the man whose duty it was refused to pass round the hat as usual for the Sustentation Fund. Possibly he felt that the people had not got value for their money. It must be frankly admitted, however, that even Elder Donald would make but a poor substitute for Mr. Mackay. He has a good memory, and his sermon of twenty minutes was only a kind of recitative exercise on all the passages of Scripture he had got by heart. He has likewise a good voice, and the sailors in the boat half-a-mile out in the bay had no difficulty in following the so-called sermon. When his voice showed symptoms of giving way he stopped the discourse and took to pounding the desk with his fists—first with one, then with the other, and latterly with both at the same time. He seemed to be performing a drum solo.

How it was possible for any one of the congregation to fall asleep baffles a stranger to understand. But it is a fact that at the afternoon diet one old woman did venture upon a nap. It was a luckless venture for that poor woman. The preacher stopped short in his discourse, and addressing her personally in a voice of thunder, asked whether she was not ashamed to be asleep in God's house. In the next world, he went on, there would be no sleep for

such as she. The woman would doubtless be cut off the communion roll, that being Mr. Mackay's short and simple method of dealing with sleepers in church. On a recent occasion there were no fewer than three old women labouring under this extreme penalty of the spiritual law at the same time. Mr. Sands relates in his book that when Mr. Mackay observes a woman asleep in church, his practice is to address her husband in this wise—"*Lachlan, dui'sg a bhean; cha bhi cadal an Ifrim*"—Lachlan, waken your wife; she won't sleep much in hell, I think." Lachlan, says Mr. Sands, sticks his elbow in his wife's ribs, and the minister, after indulging in a low chuckle, pauses until the woman is thoroughly aroused.

The evening service over, everybody hurries home, and a second hour of family worship brings the day's routine to a close. It is then just time to tumble into bed. Anything in the shape of variety or relaxation during the entire day is forbidden. One must not be seen beyond the precincts of one's own house except on the way to or from church. Everybody wears a sad and rueful face, and it is difficult to get your next door neighbour to converse on any but sacred subjects. Even the tones of your voice must be lowered; and it will improve you not a little in the estimation of the islanders if you can contrive to speak in a minor key. But what-

ever you do, absent not yourself from Mr. Mackay's eight hours' sermonising, unless you wish to be accounted a heathen man. And if you go to church, make up your mind at once to hear many unpleasant things addressed to you personally from the pulpit. It is Mr. Mackay's way of preaching.

Dr. Rainy and his friends might well turn their attention to making the St. Kilda church a little more comfortable. To sit for two hours at a stretch, and eight hours in one day, with one's feet imbedded in the cold damp clay is a diversion that no sane man will care to practise willingly oftener than once in his life. Therefore, a wooden floor is the first desideratum towards making the church more comfortable. A stove is also much needed, but in this matter the St. Kildians have conscientious scruples. One was sent to the island quite recently to be fitted up in the church, but it gave rise to much anxious searching of hearts among the islanders. They asked themselves whether it would be a proper thing to introduce a stove into the sanctuary. At first nobody cared to give a deliberate answer; even the minister, who is nothing if not dogmatic, was silent. His good angel, the housekeeper, came to the rescue. She pronounced the stove to be equally "godless" with the organ, and declared that it therefore could not be admitted into the house of the Lord. The scales fell from the eyes

of minister and people in an instant. They backed up the housekeeper, and the stove was sent home across the sea to the depraved Sassenach.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "BOAT-COLD."

You are not long on St. Kilda before you hear of the *cnatan na gall*. This is variously interpreted as the strangers' cough, the strangers' cold, the boat-cold, or the Harris cold. The very day our party arrived on the island one of the natives insinuated that we would no doubt have brought, among other good things, a dose of the *cnatan na gall*. This was said as a "feeler," and the immediate excuse for its being said was that one of our number had been observed to sneeze. Happily the culprit understood thoroughly the idiosyncrasies of the islanders, and he was able to meet them on their own ground. He convinced them that if he really was suffering from the *cnatan na gall* he must have caught it since setting foot on the island that very morning. The incident was not lost upon us. We were all careful afterwards never to sneeze in public.

Only a medical man should write about this

cnatan na gall. It is barely possible for any one else to do so without treating the thing as a joke. The firm belief of the people is that whenever a vessel visits the island they are sure to be affected with this strange distemper—hence the name, strangers' cough, or boat-cold. There are degrees of severity of the trouble. For instance, the islanders told me that if the infection was brought by a vessel from Glasgow or Liverpool the "cold" was not so severe as if it came from Harris, which has the reputation of sending the worst type. Mr. Sands, in his book on St. Kilda, says he has joined in the laugh against the islanders for their belief in this strange trouble; but yet, he adds, "after all, there may be some truth in it;" and he solemnly records the fact that on the arrival of the factor's smack in 1876 every one of the natives caught this peculiar cold, as they did again at the beginning of the following year, when a shipwrecked Austrian crew landed on the island.

In the absence of a doctor I should have looked in ordinary circumstances to the clergyman for some little assistance in trying to solve this mysterious malady; but Mr. Mackay is not the sort of man to rise above the prejudices and superstitions of the people. Moreover, I had no opportunity of studying the *cnatan na gall* for myself during my stay on the island, as nobody was seized with it. Six days after our arrival I asked the most intelligent man, and the

man who had taken Mr. Mackay's place in the pulpit on the first Sunday after the Rev. gentleman's illness, whether any of the people had taken the *cnatan na gall*. "Not as yet," was the cautious reply. I ventured to express my belief that they would be all safe, now that our party had been so many days on the island. He thought so too, but, he added, cautious as ever, "when our men come home from Boreray they may take it." It was impossible not to laugh at the superstitious dread of the man who had lectured the islanders on the Sunday previous to the tune of half an hour on the 10th chapter of Romans. He joined good naturedly in the laugh at his own expense, saying, however, as he did so, "Justify yourself that you did not bring the cold."

But, really, it would seem that there is something in this *cnatan na gall*. If we are to believe the register kept by the Rev. Neil M'Kenzie, three of the sixty-eight deaths which took place on the island between July 18, 1830, and October 31, 1846, were actually from this cause. And it is no new thing, for Martin, who visited St. Kilda in the summer of 1697, and was the first to write of the island from personal experience, is careful to refer to it. It still existed in the time of Dr. Johnson, who had his joke about it when he visited the Hebrides. On its being suggested to him that the epidemic might be accounted for on physical principles—viz., from the effect of *effluvia*

from human bodies, the great moralist asked—"How can there be a physical effect without a physical cause?" And he went on in a playful mood to say that "the arrival of a shipful of strangers would kill them (the St. Kildians); for if one stranger gives them one cold, two strangers must give them two colds, and so in proportion."

Readers of Sir George Trevelyan's *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* will remember the reference to Dr. Johnson's visit to Calder, and the interest he manifested in the minister's allusion to the "boat cough." The minister of Calder was the Rev. Kenneth Macaulay, grand-uncle of the historian. He visited St. Kilda in 1758, being then minister of Ardnamurchan, and wrote a book about the island. The book, says Sir George, happened to fall into the hands of Dr. Johnson, who spoke of it more than once with favour. His reason for liking the book was characteristic. "Macaulay had recorded the belief prevalent in St. Kilda that as soon as the factor landed on the island all the inhabitants had an attack which, from the account, appears to have partaken of the nature both of influenza and bronchitis. This touched the superstitious vein in Johnson, who praised Macaulay for his 'magnanimity' in venturing to chronicle so questionable a phenomenon; the more so because, said Dr. Johnson, 'Macaulay set out with a prejudice against prejudice, and wanted to be a smart modern thinker.'"

For a long time it was thought that the prevalence of an east wind was possibly the cause of this singular complaint. To go back again to the pages of Boswell's "Life," it is there stated that an "ingenious friend," the Rev. Mr. Christian, of Dorking, had suggested this cause; and in quite recent times Mr. Frank Buckland, in a paper to *Land and Water* on a cruise of the Herring Commissioners on board the "Jackal," propounded the same theory. This, however, has now been quite discredited. Mr. John E. Morgan, a Member of the Royal College of Physicians, Manchester, in a valuable article on the diseases of St. Kilda, makes the suggestion that the usual isolation of the inhabitants—who are under exceptional conditions both as regards diet and occupation—when followed by sudden contact with strangers may exercise an infectious influence on the more susceptible of their number.

A parallel case has been cited. In the account of the cruise of H.M.S. "Galatea" in 1867-68, it is mentioned that while "Tristan d'Acunha is a remarkably healthy island, it is a singular fact that any vessel touching there from St. Helena invariably brings with it a disease resembling influenza." In his book on St. Kilda, Mr. Seton inclines to the theory propounded by Mr. Morgan, and supported by other authorities. He puts it in this pointed and plausible way—that the mysterious ailment may be

produced by "a feverish excitement arising from the contact of a higher with a lower civilisation."

No deaths appear to have taken place from the "boat-cold" in recent years—and, indeed, its occurrence seems now to be rare. This fact confirms the view just stated as to the cause of the complaint. The arrival of a vessel is now a more commonplace affair than it used to be, and it consequently must give rise to less commotion, though even yet it is sufficient to send these poor invertibrate creatures into a fit of nervous excitement such as cool-headed Saxons have really no conception of. By an effort of the imagination one who has seen this raging fever can form some notion of the kind of thing that may have taken place in less recent times when the island was rarely visited oftener than once or twice in a year. Simultaneously with this mitigating influence there has naturally been an increased knowledge of the ways of civilised man, so that, even if the lower grade is quite as low as ever it was, there is less cause for friction when it comes into contact with the higher grade of civilisation.

Writing on this subject in a recent number of the *British Medical Journal*, Dr. Macdonald of Beith says:—"When I visited St. Kilda in June last year (1885), I noticed that almost every person on the island was suffering from a cough. This cough, I was told, they contracted from a party on board a

steamer which was there a few days previously. I examined the chest of a few of them, and I could hear the moist *rôles* of bronchial catarrh in one or two of the worst cases. I asked the minister if he could in any way account for this affection. He told me that he had no doubt as to its cause. The air in St. Kilda, he said, was so pure, and as the natives were unaccustomed to inhale any impurities from their atmosphere, they were liable to be attacked in this way whenever people from other parts, where the air is more or less polluted, visited St. Kilda. Although works on germ-theories and micro-organisms have never figured in the St. Kilda minister's library, yet I do not think that his theory of the cause of this disease is far from being correct. It is very probable that the atmosphere in St. Kilda is free from a number of disease-causing organisms, which are rife in other parts, where the inhabitants are more or less inured to them. In this way it is possible that these agents of disease are innocuous unless a chill, damp, or other condition inimical to health predisposes the individual to their attack. Not so in St. Kilda. This inoculation of the inhabitants does not take place, consequently they suffer, as a rule, when they are exposed to their influence. Is it not also possible that consanguinity may be a factor in the predisposition of this disease, as well as of the infantile affection?"

In a subsequent number of the same Journal (September 4, 1886), Mr. R. Augustine Chudleigh writes:—"Under its Maori name of murri-murri, I have been for eighteen years much interested in the St. Kilda cold and everything connected with it. When Boswell and Johnson visited the Hebrides in 1773, the disorder was evidently an article of popular belief, though the medical man himself had as little respect for the mysterious cold as for the Rev. Kenneth Macaulay, who vouched for its existence. It appears that several physicians have visited St. Kilda since 1773, but they have not quite settled the question of *enatan na gall* either way. May I, therefore, cite the case of the island of Wharekauri, one of the Chatham group, about 480 miles east of New Zealand, nearly at the antipodes of St. Kilda, where, under the name of murri-murri, an identical disorder, with a similar alleged origin, is now frequent. In its main features murri-murri is indistinguishable from a severe influenza cold. Its invasion may occupy four hours; the patient remains 'intensely miserable' for about four days, when the disorder gradually dies away. No period of incubation precedes, and no permanent ill effects are observed to follow. One attack does not preclude the recurrence, and European residents as well as Maori and Murioti natives are liable to the disorder. In order to be infected a person need not know that a ship has

come; indeed, the mere appearance of murri-murri is proof to the inhabitants—even at distant parts of the island, which is 30 miles long—that a ship is in port, inasmuch that, on no other evidence, people have actually ridden off to Waitangi to fetch their letters. There is a hill whence one can see across the island into Waitangi Bay; and people are wont to climb this hill and scan the bay for a ship, on no other evidence than the occurrence of murri-murri. It is very curious that the name of that hill is Mount Dieffenbach, and that the ship which would have been descried thence would almost certainly have been the “St. Kilda,” which for many years did the trade of the islands. There may have been connection between St. Kilda and Wharekauri.”

CHAPTER VIII.

INFANTILE LOCKJAW.

THE “eight-day sickness” or infantile lockjaw (*trismus nascentium*) is the most appalling thing connected with St. Kilda. Roughly speaking, one-half of the children born on the island come into the world only to die of this terrible scourge when they are a few days old. Medical men have been casting about for the

cause of this frightful mortality, while pious men of a certain type have been peacefully folding their hands, endeavouring to console themselves with the fatalistic reflection, quite worthy of the unspeakable Turk, that after all it is the Almighty's business, not theirs.

Only a year or two ago Miss Macleod, sister of the proprietor, on one of her visits to the island, made a suggestion to the people that a properly-qualified female nurse should be sent to them, but a certain old man, who shall here be nameless, met the proposal with the devout exclamation—"If it's God's will that babies should die nothing you can do will save them!" Mr. Sands bears testimony to the fact that he has "heard more than one pious gentleman suggest that this distemper was probably a wise provision of Providence for preventing a redundant population on a rock where food was limited." I have heard the same idea expressed even more dogmatically. On my way home from St. Kilda I had the pleasure of meeting a great gun of the Free Church—a gentleman who makes the Assembly Hall ring with his ponderous voice every year. Learning from a mutual friend that I had been to St. Kilda, he had many questions to ask about the minister and the people. On the subject of this terrible lockjaw he became particularly loquacious. With a knowing air, and evidently wishing the company to understand that he was coaching me with my facts,

he was not ashamed to say that this lockjaw was a wise device of the Almighty for keeping the population within the resources of the island. When I asked him how he could reconcile this theory with the two facts that not so very long ago the population was nearly three times as large as it is to-day, and that as a fishing station the island could easily maintain two or three thousand people he was dumb. His dispensation to speak of the ways of Providence evidently did not carry him so far as this.

This disease has afflicted St. Kilda for over a century at least. Macaulay, writing in 1758, says the infants born on the island were then peculiarly subject to it. The symptoms at that time do not appear to have been different from what they are in our own day. "On the fourth or fifth day after their birth many of them give up sucking; on the seventh their gums are so clenched together that it is impossible to get anything down their throats. Soon after this symptom appears they are seized with convulsive fits, and after struggling against excessive torments till their strength is exhausted die generally on the eighth day." Prior to 1830 we have no mortality returns for our guidance; we have a vague, general statement by a medical writer in 1838 that eight out of every ten children succumbed to this terrible scourge; and Mr. M'Raild, the factor, at a more recent date put the rate still higher. His estimate was that nine out of every ten

infants succumbed to the deadly lockjaw. Mr. Morgan, on the other hand, puts the proportion of deaths at five in every nine births.

Fortunately there is no occasion for uncertainty or guess-making on the point so far as the period since 1830 is concerned, if we except a few years following the Disruption. The Rev. Neil Mackenzie instituted, on his being sent by the Church of Scotland to St. Kilda in 1830, a register of births, marriages, and deaths. Mr. Mackenzie left the island in 1844, but his register of deaths is really made up to 1846, and covers a period of slightly over 16 years. When the Free Church took up the reins of power the register appears to have been neglected or forgotten, and accordingly we have no returns between 1846 and 1856. In the latter year the Registrar-General interfered, and at his instance the island was constituted a registration district. Such it still is, with the Rev. Mr. Mackay as registrar in addition to his other duties, temporal and spiritual. One peculiarity about Mr. Mackay's "district" is that the returns need necessarily be transmitted to Edinburgh only once every ten years. In justice to Mr. Mackay, let it be stated that the Rev. gentleman does not always avail himself of this official freedom. He is better than his instructions, and is therefore a good registrar; if he was only equally successful at sermon-making he would have fewer squabbles with the triumvirate of elders. As a matter

of fact the registration returns are sent to Edinburgh much oftener than once in ten years.

Through the courtesy of the Registrar-General, Edinburgh, who has very kindly placed the statistics in his possession at my disposal, and also by means of information obtained from other sources, I am enabled to present the complete returns from 1830 down to the month of June last, with the exception of the ten years from 1846 to 1856, for which, as just stated, there are no figures in existence. During the first period of sixteen years, viz., from 1830 to 1846, the total number of deaths on the island was, as above mentioned, 68. Of these no fewer than 32 certainly resulted from this one fearful malady, and the total infantile mortality was 37—26 males and 11 females. The number of baptisms was 72, and the total population of the island was slightly over 100.

The second period, for which the returns are in possession of the Registrar-General, embraces thirty and a-half years, namely, from the beginning of 1856 to the end of June last. In those years the number of deaths actually exceeded the number of births. The births numbered 81—5 of them illegitimate—and the deaths 84. It must be stated that seven of the deaths resulted from drowning by the loss of a boat named the "Dargavel," and two from falling over a precipice. Of the total—84—no fewer than 52 represent infants who died between the fourth

and the twenty-seventh day after birth. Practically the whole of these died from lockjaw. In one instance, where the infant was twenty-seven days old, consumption is put down as the "supposed disease." Two cases are tabulated under pleurisy, two under colic, three under convulsions, and a good many are entered "unknown" or "not specified." Taking into account the gross ignorance of the people, and their utter lack of medical knowledge, it may be pretty safely assumed that all, or nearly all, the infantile mortality was due to the same cause, and one has the more confidence in coming to this conclusion from the fact of many of the deaths, not definitely stated to be from lockjaw, having occurred on or about the fatal eighth day.

In clearly-defined cases of this disease death results on the eighth oftener than on any other day. Hence the name "eight-day sickness." On analysing the 52 cases I find that in 12 death resulted on the eighth day. This is equal to about 23 per cent. of the whole. The ninth and the seventh days after birth rank next in the analysis, the one being credited with eight deaths and the other with seven. One death resulted on the fourth day after birth, two on the fifth, three on the sixth, five on the tenth, and so on up to the twenty-seventh day, on which the case of "supposed consumption" is stated to have occurred. It is remarkable that the fatality does

not press anything like equally on the two sexes. Of the 52 deaths, 34 were males and 18 females. Comparing the one period with the other, the result is that while in the period between 1830 and 1846 the infant mortality was $54\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the total number of deaths, in the last thirty and a-half years it has risen to 62 per cent., and this simultaneously with an unusually large number of adult deaths from accidental causes. In the later period the population of the island has been considerably reduced by emigration. At the Government census in 1861 it was 78; in 1871, 71; and at present it is 79, including four persons who are not natives.

Till quite recently there was no apparent falling off in the tremendously high infantile mortality. Doctors, who are proverbial for differing, could not agree as to the cause of the disease, and in that condition of things it was idle to look seriously for a cure. It was pointed out by various writers that in one of the Westmann Islands, off the coast of Iceland, infant life was swept away in an even greater proportion, but this apparently parallel case did not furnish any solution of the difficulty. A medical writer suggested that the use of birds' excrements as fuel, and birds' fat for lighting purposes, was the secret of the high mortality in the Westmann Islands, but Dr. Arthur Mitchell, an eminent authority, declined to accept this theory for St. Kilda.

Another case was adduced. Of 17,650 children born in the Dublin Hospital down to the end of 1782, 2,944 died within the first fortnight, about 19 out of every 20 of the deaths resulting from this same disease, which is known in Ireland as "nine-day fits." Foul and vitiated air was suspected to be the cause, and this being overcome, the mortality was reduced from 17 per cent. to a little over 5 per cent. With this instance before them, many ascribed the malady to the terribly bad atmosphere in the St. Kilda houses, arising from the carefully-studied absence of ventilation and the noxious gases emitted from all sorts of abominable refuse. Others put down the disease to the effects of intermarriage, others again to the absence of midwifery skill on the island, and still another school sought the cause in neglect and the improper food given either to the mother or the child, or both.

Medical opinion generally favoured the theory of consanguinity being the predisposing cause of infantile lockjaw in St. Kilda. In the article by Dr. Macdonald, Beith, already quoted from, the writer points out that if the injurious results usually attributed to consanguineous marriages—deaf-mutism, insanity, idiocy, and imbecility—have not manifested themselves in St. Kilda, this may be accounted for by the absence of mental tension, and by the constant, quiet, peaceful uniformity of the life which the people lead, and he

suggests that the deteriorating effects of consanguinity have assumed an unusual phase, predisposing the newly-born infants to a hyperæsthesia of the nerve-centres, which may be excited by deficient ventilation, dirt, improper feeding, or some other cause. "Why this condition should remain only during the first few days of the infant's life we can no more explain than we can account for its existence."

One of the writers who took part in the controversy, now a good many years ago, was Rear-Admiral Otter, a gentleman who manifested a warm interest in St. Kilda. "As to the mortality of the children," he wrote, "I believe the cause can be traced to the oily nature of their food, consisting chiefly of sea-birds. . . . The startling mortality of the children before the ninth or tenth day (which has not been over-rated) is caused by the strength of the mother's milk while nursing; and to prove this theory, a child being born during our stay, the mother was kept on cocoa, meat, and biscuit, and the child throve well." Of course an isolated case like this proves nothing, nevertheless the view expressed by Admiral Otter is one that finds many adherents. Somewhat in the same direction Miss Macleod, who has all along shown the keenest anxiety to ameliorate the condition of the St. Kildians, has elsewhere pointed out that there is a tendency to inflammation among the islanders owing to the nature of their food. Miss Macleod has

repeatedly visited St. Kilda, and she relates that upon a recent visit she saw port wine and cow's milk being poured down the throat of an infant one day old! The St. Kildians are indeed adepts in the art of making strange and wonderful potions. After all, a doctor is little needed by such handy people. They are quite able to poison themselves. A common practice till quite recently, as I was informed, was to administer raw whisky to babies a few days old. Whether the practice was common or not, I have what I consider sufficient evidence to show that it certainly existed.

But all this is changed now, and if it did not sound like hallooing before one is out of the wood, the prophecy might be ventured that the corner has happily been turned at last. It really looks as if the rift in the cloud had made its appearance, and that the high infantile mortality in St. Kilda was to be a thing of the past. Mr. Sands, who during his stay on the island had the fortunate opportunity of seeing several cases of the disease, had no difficulty in making up his mind that "the infant was killed by improper feeding." Miss Macleod, who had been exerting herself on behalf of the islanders about the same time, came to the conclusion that what was needed was a trained nurse. In the first place, she endeavoured to induce a native of the island to undergo a course of training in Edinburgh, but failing

in this she sent out to St. Kilda two or three years ago at her own expense a fully trained and proficient nurse, who had spent the greater part of her life in the capital of Scotland. At the outset the nurse had the deep-rooted prejudices of the islanders to fight against. They believed in use and wont—the old system and the old nurse. If half of what is still told on the island is true, the system was a bad system, and the old nurse—well, the less said about her the better.

Within the past year or two the islanders, it would seem, have given up their faith in both. There is no more raw whisky poured down the throats of young babies, no more doses of port wine and milk, and no more of the disgusting practices which used to disgrace the island. The last death from lockjaw occurred on June 7, 1885. That was the last case under the old *régime*, which had been expiring gradually for some time before that. Since then there have been three births on the island, and in none of the three cases was the infant seized with lockjaw. Since the beginning of 1884 there have been eight births, and six of the infants still survive. There have thus been only two deaths out of the eight births—the one just referred to, and another also from lockjaw on May 27, 1884. The new nurse claims that in no case wholly under her care has the infant been attacked by lockjaw. Whatever doctors

may think, she has no hesitation in attributing the disease to improper food and treatment. Not for some years, however, will it be possible to say definitely that the cause and the cure have been discovered, and that one of the scandals of our country has been wiped out.

In the meantime the islanders still live under the shadow of the terrible plague. It is a melancholy testimony to its ravages and to the ghastly dread with which it fills the people's minds that even still a mother never thinks of providing clothing for her babe until she sees whether or not it survives the first few crucial days. The little creature is wrapped up in cloths of coarse home-made flannel, and compelled to prove, so to speak, its right to wear the clothing of a decent Christian baby before a single stitch is sewed.

CHAPTER IX.

AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE.

THOUGH his scanty wealth exists for most part in the birds of the air, the St. Kildian is primarily a crofter. He has his few acres of worn-out and badly tilled land, his small but greatly-prized stock of sickly-looking cattle and sheep, and he receives the annual visit of a gentleman who comes "to plunder,

under the name of Macleod's factor." There never was a crofter who did not associate his lot with such a visitor. Whatever truth there may have been in the allegation against the factor of St. Kilda at the time when Lord Brougham turned his neat period, there is no foundation for it now. All the same, the St. Kildians of to-day do not hail their factor as an angel of light; if one could only get at their inmost thoughts it would possibly appear that they regard themselves as the most oppressed among crofters.

To set this matter right we have but to look at the rents the people pay. Into the factor's trading transactions with the people I do not now enter, because this is a matter entirely in the people's own hands. They are now at liberty to buy from and sell to whom they like. What, then, are the rents the people pay? As I explained in a previous chapter, the arable land is divided into sixteen crofts each having a house attached. The total area of arable land has been estimated at 40 acres, which would give an average of $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres per croft. As regards the houses, they are neat and comfortable. They were built by the late proprietor in 1861-62 and are certainly a long way in advance of the average crofter's house in the West Highlands. The walls are of stone, seven or eight feet high, and the roofs are covered with zinc. Each house stands apart

from the others, and in every instance the interior is divided into two apartments by a wooden partition.

For house and croft the rent is £2 per annum. Even if you take the croft alone, as some would do who appear to think that the houses are the inalienable property of the islanders, the rent is not excessive. Why the house should not be included is a thing no one save a crofter can pretend to understand. Over and above this £2, the people pay rent for the common pasture of the island. For the grazing of each cow the charge made by the proprietor is 7s. per annum. For sheep the charge is 9d. a head on St. Kilda and 6d. a head on the adjacent islands. By no manner of means can it be held that these rates are excessive. The total rental of the island in 1885-6 was about £60, but before any reader fetches his slate to find out what rate of interest this represents on a capital sum of £3,000—the price paid by the present proprietor for the island in 1871—let me hasten to explain that not a penny of it went into the pocket of Macleod. The expenses of factorship, which are necessarily heavy, including, as they do, two trips to the island every year in a smack specially chartered for the purpose, would appear to have eaten up all that the crofters saw their way to pay. Of course the people could hardly be crofters if they were not in arrears to the landlord.

Formerly the islanders paid each year on a fixed number of sheep and cattle. Some were possibly paying too much and others too little. The people regarded this method of fixing the rents as a grievance, and at their request the proprietor lately agreed to regulate the rent each year by the actual number of cattle and sheep in the possession of the islanders. A letter from Macleod intimating this was read to the people during my stay on the island, and gave much satisfaction. The number of cattle on the island was ascertained to be about 40, and of sheep the total number on St. Kilda and adjacent islands was close upon 1,000. Parenthetically I may explain that the island is $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles long by $1\frac{1}{4}$ broad, but it only affords grazing on a small extent of its surface. The cattle are of the West Highland breed, mostly black, or red and black, in colour. A considerable proportion of the sheep are of the old St. Kilda breed; the others are a cross between that and the blackfaced variety. Writing in 1819, Dr. Macculloch described the St. Kilda breed of sheep as Norwegian. Mr. James Wilson (a brother of "Christopher North") visited the island in 1841, and pronounced the sheep to be Danish. Two centuries ago old Martin wrote cautiously about them that "generally they are speckled, some white, some philamort(?), and of an ordinary size. They do not resemble goats in anything, as Buchanan was

informed, except in their horns, which are extraordinarily large, particularly in the lesser isles."

In appearance this peculiar breed of sheep are not unlike fallow deer; their wool is thin and coarse, and generally of a dun colour; their necks and legs are long, their tails short, and they often have an additional number of horns. They are mostly to be found on the smaller islands around St. Kilda, running there wild, and receiving no attention whatever except at *plucking* time. The mutton is peculiarly delicate and highly flavoured. All the sheep on the little island of Soa, numbering several hundred, belong to this breed, and there are also a few on St. Kilda itself. The Soa sheep are the property of the proprietor, Macleod, who allows the St. Kildians one-half of each year's crop of wool for their tearing it off the animals backs with their fingers. It often happens that the St. Kildians do not go to Soa from one year's end to another; and in such cases the sheep must consider themselves lucky in escaping the barbarous practices of Mr. Mackay's people. The fecundity of this breed of sheep is remarkable. There is an instance on record of a single sheep having, in the course of 13 months, been the means of adding nine to the flock. She had three lambs in the month of March one year, three more in the same month the year after, and each of the first three had a lamb before being 13 months old.

The wool of the dun-coloured sheep is very valuable—worth twice the price of the blackfaced; and hence there is now something like an attempt to keep the breed pure. Nothing is applied to the sheep by way of smearing, yet they appear to be quite free from scab and other skin diseases. The islanders sell neither sheep nor wool. The wool they make into blanketing and tweed, which they sell, and each family kills from two to five sheep for the winter's supply of mutton. At present the number of sheep possessed by each crofter varies from 10 or 12 to about 150. The number of sheep and cattle on the island has decreased in about the same ratio as the number of human beings within the past 200 years.

Horses have become extinct altogether. Not so long ago every crofter had his pony, some of them as many as four or five—a crofter's pride is in proportion to the number of horses he is able to keep—but the number gradually decreased until about forty years ago when, the people say, the lessee of the island banished the few that remained on the pretext of their being "destructive to the grass." Some day the cattle and sheep may be expatriated for the same reason. Dogs the islanders keep in great numbers. They are a mongrel breed of collie, used for bird-catching as well as following sheep. Every crofter has two or three, and the total number on the island is about forty. They

run in packs like wolves, and are almost as savage and troublesome. Their loud barking as they congregate on the shore to give you welcome is very impressive when you first set your foot on St. Kilda. The people are proud of their army of dogs, and it is their common boast when speaking of any offensive person that if he dares to plant a foot on their rock-bound shore the dogs will quickly "do" for him. I have known threats of this kind emanate even from the manse kitchen. Cats are plentiful in St. Kilda, and so are mice, but rats are unknown. There are now a few hens on the island, the minister having four.

The soil of St. Kilda is a fine black loam, resting on granite. The pasture is the finest in the Western Islands, but the return given by the arable part of the island is miserably poor. This is to be accounted for by the fact that the land is never allowed any rest under grass. Oats and potatoes are practically the only crops. Until the time of the Rev. Mr. Mackenzie's pastorship the soil was turned with a kind of crooked spade, and to Mr. Mackenzie is due the credit of introducing the use of the common spade. The implements now in use are spades, hoes, graips, rakes, and picks. The principal portion of the land under cultivation is enclosed by a stone fence, and occupies a gentle slope between the crescent-shaped village and the shore. There are also little

fertile spots here and there on the stony hills marked off with a stone fence and cultivated.

It is a common complaint with the people that they have no fuel; hence they have very wantonly bared their hillsides of turf, which they burn like peats. The destruction of good pasture in this way still goes on despite the prohibition of proprietor and factor. Small wonder that the island is decreasing in wealth and its ability to support human beings. One day, if the present state of matters is allowed to go on long enough, the problem of what is to be done with the St. Kildians will be solved in a very simple manner. I satisfied myself that there is abundance of moss on the island, from which the best of peats could be obtained. The islanders deny the existence of moss, but there it is; only it is not quite so near the people's doors as the turf, and, moreover, it would demand more labour to work.

A curious feature of St. Kilda, and one that strikes every visitor as he enters the bay, is the large number of little dome-shaped buildings scattered over the island in every direction. They resemble ovens, are built of stone, are eight or ten feet in diameter and from four to five in height, and have each a doorway through which you may crawl on all fours. They are round when they occupy a level position on the summit of a hill, and oval when placed on a hillside. The Gaelic name for these

houses is *cleit* (plural *cleitan*). Formerly they were used by the people for drying birds before salt was introduced into the island. In Martin's time (1697) they were five hundred in number; at present they must amount to several thousands, this estimate covering the whole group of islands. In these houses the St. Kildian crofter dries his grass and grain. He has a habitual distrust of the weather, and never attempts to dry any of his crops in the open air.

The climate of St. Kilda may be described generally as mild for these regions. To quote once more from Martin the air is "sharp and wholesome," but at certain times of the year it is very humid, just as might have been expected. This is particularly the case with south-west winds, which often prove very troublesome in autumn and winter. Great storms frequently occur. The "Apostle of the North" experienced such a storm on the occasion of his third mission to the island in 1830. Writing in his diary under date, Thursday, July 8, 1830, he observes—"A view of a St. Kilda storm was certainly presented to us this day. The sea all in a commotion—its billows rising mountains high, and dashing with fury against the lofty rocks all around, which oblige them in their turn to retire and sink into their mother ocean—the columns of spray which issue out of this conflict and overlap the highest

mountains—all these present a sight awfully grand and sublime.” And with a singular aptness Dr. M'Donald addressed the terrified islanders that day on Isaiah's words—“A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest.” The state of the day suggested the subject to the preacher, and the same circumstance seemed to give it force with the hearers.

There have been numerous severe storms since then, the last of any consequence being that of September 12–14, 1885, which led to the Relief Expedition of October following. During my stay of fifteen days there were two storms, quite severe enough, though only of second or third rate importance. The sea was in a great fury, and the spray leapt up the precipitous coast to a height of 50 feet. Any remarks on the weather of St. Kilda would be incomplete without mention of the fact that the Rev. Mr. Mackay takes charge of a rain-gauge in the manse garden, and contributes statistics of the rainfall to the secretary of the Scottish Meteorological Society.

CHAPTER X.

BIRDS AND BIRD-CATCHING.

As I remarked in the previous chapter, the wealth of the little colony is chiefly in the sea-birds, which

congregate on St. Kilda and the adjacent islands in countless myriads. It would be difficult to exaggerate the number of birds which are to be seen on the group of islands for eight or nine months of the year. A writer, usually careful about his facts, has put it on record that in one year, 1876, no fewer than 89,600 of one bird alone, the *bougir* or puffin, were slaughtered by the St. Kildians. Certainly the destruction of puffins, fulmars, and gannets amounts every year to a total that would hardly be credited, and yet the available supply seems to suffer hardly any appreciable diminution. In the St. Kildian economy every bird is prized for both its feathers and its carcass, the latter being the staple of the people's food; one species, the fulmar, yields in addition a valuable oil, which is used for lighting purposes on the island, and is also exported.

The birds most plentiful on the St. Kilda group of islands are the fulmar-petrel, gannet or solan goose, puffin, guillemot, and razor-bill, all of which are valuable to the people. The Fulmar or Fulmar-petrel is the bird peculiarly identified with St. Kilda. In size it resembles a gull. It is to be found on the island all the year round, with the exception of the period between the end of August and the middle of November, and of a few days in spring. The islanders have no idea where the bird migrates to; they say it

merely goes out to the ocean. Perhaps no bird flies so gracefully as the fulmar. It seems to float in the air apparently without any effort, and can move for several minutes at a time without beating its wings. The plumage of the head, neck, breast, and tail is of a dingy white and that of the back and wings slate-grey. The bill is of a pale-yellow colour, very strong, about an inch and a-half in length and sub-cylindrical in form. The female bird lays but one egg in a season, and that about the middle of May. Early in August the young fulmar is able to fly, and on the 12th of that month—a day associated in a similar manner with another bird—the fowling season begins, continuing for two or three weeks. Rarely does the fulmar burrow deep enough in the ground to conceal itself while incubating, and in the season some parts of the cliffs are to be seen literally white with the birds sitting on their nests. Whilst he is being caught the fulmar tries, as a defensive measure, to eject by his mouth and tubular nostrils an offensive stinging oil into the face of his captor. This oil is amber-coloured, and its disagreeable smell pervades everything and everybody in St. Kilda all the year round. It is the aim of the fowler to dispatch the bird expeditiously before the oil has been ejected, and if he succeeds in this, the oil, usually about half a pint in quantity, is extracted from the stomach of the bird, and emptied into a bag formed of the stomachs of solan geese and carried for the purpose.

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This oil is burned in the lamps, and a quantity is also exported to Skye, where it is used for smearing sheep. The people sell it to the factor at a shilling the St. Kilda pint, which is equal to five English pints. For the feathers of this bird the factor allows 5s. per St. Kilda stone of 24 lbs. As in the time of Martin so today, the St. Kildians prefer the flesh of the fulmar to any other article of diet. I tasted the flesh and found it to have a greasy, oily flavour, such as could not be relished but by those accustomed to it. Every family lays past several hundred carcasses of this bird for use during the winter. The fulmar has been not inaptly named the skunk of birds. Its principal food is fish, but it is often to be seen following whale-ships for any offal that may be thrown overboard, and a wounded whale is said to attract great flocks of the bird, eager to alight on the carcass and devour the blubber. Recent observations show that the fulmar is slightly decreasing in numbers in St. Kilda.

The Puffin, which comes next in usefulness to the fulmar, is the most common of the various birds. Every bit of suitable cliff on the group of islands is occupied by it, and at times great flocks literally obscure the sea. This bird, which is well known on different parts of the coast, is about the size of a pigeon. The plumage is black on the back, and red and white about the breast; the legs and feet are red, and the beak is charmingly marked with vermilion, dark-grey,

and yellow. The puffin is a very pretty bird, with a slightly comical appearance, and looking as if fully conscious of his own beauty. His food is fish fry. The St. Kildians catch this bird in various ways in enormous numbers—by means of dogs trained for the purpose, by snares fixed in the ground, and by a noose at the end of a rod carried in the hand. The puffin burrows in the ground to make its nest, in which the female lays one egg. If, however, the egg is taken away she will replace it by another. If the second is also stolen she lays a third. For the feathers of this bird the factor pays 6s. per stone of 24 lbs. The people consume a few of the carcasses of the puffin, but they do not relish them in anything like the same degree as those of the fulmar. In an overwhelming majority of cases the puffin is killed for its feathers, and the carcass is simply thrown away, going usually to enrich the soil. This bird leaves the island about the beginning of September, and returns on the 1st of May.

The Gannet or solan goose does not breed on St. Kilda, but on the adjacent uninhabited island of Boreray, where it is to be seen at the proper season in great numbers. The gannet is a large bird, occasionally measuring 5 feet across the wings from tip to tip. It is all pure white except the head which is brown, and the tip of the wings where the plumage is black. The bill is long and straight, with a slight

crook at the point and of a dark colour. The egg is somewhat less in size than that of a land goose. Besides the St. Kilda group of islands, the solan goose breeds on the Bass Rock, Ailsa Craig, and one or two other places. The favourite food of the solan goose is herring and mackerel, and some interesting calculations have been made of the number of fish which this species of bird alone consumes, to the detriment of course of the supply available for man. Mr. James Wilson, the well-known ornithologist and brother of "Christopher North," who visited St. Kilda in August, 1841, estimated the number of solan geese in the St. Kilda group at 200,000, and he arrived at the conclusion that the number of fish devoured by them amounted to 214,000,000 in a year. This is equal to 305,714 barrels, much more than the total average number of herrings branded at all the north-east stations of Scotland.

The Guillemot (*uria troile*) abounds in great numbers. This bird is killed for its feathers, the carcass which is very tough being rarely eaten. A good business is also done in the bird's eggs, which being beautifully marked are readily purchased as souvenirs by visitors at a penny a-piece. They are a little smaller than those of the fulmar. The guillemot is nocturnal in its habits. The black guillemot (*uria grylle*) is a much rarer bird, and is the least numerous of the auks.

The Razor-bill (*alca torda*) is almost as plentiful as the common variety of guillemot. This bird like the puffin burrows in the ground, and is caught by dogs. The flesh is eaten by the islanders. Being almost as pretty as those of the guillemot, the eggs are marketed in considerable numbers. They are usually smaller and more oval in shape, and are more difficult to obtain.

The White-tailed Eagle is a rare visitor in St. Kilda. Whenever the bird makes a nest, the islanders destroy it by fire, selecting by lots the men who must descend the cliff and perform the dangerous undertaking.

Two or three pairs of the Peregrine are said to tenant the most inaccessible portions of the islands. The Dun rock is the bird's favourite haunt.

The Kestrel occasionally visits St. Kilda, but it is not known ever to breed there.

St. Kilda is believed to be the only part of the kingdom where the Great Auk ever bred. The last specimen was taken in 1822. Specimens of the bird and its eggs are now very valuable.

It was supposed for some time that a wren, pretty numerous on St. Kilda, was peculiar to the island, but this has recently been proved not to be the case. It is found in several other parts of Europe.

The most recent observations show that twenty-seven different birds breed regularly on the St. Kilda group of islands, four breed occasionally, while a

considerable number are only visitors, most of them during the spring and autumn migrations.

Now about the different methods of fowling. All the men in the island are adepts at fowling, and from their youth up there is nothing they so much desire to excel in. They have of course different methods with different birds, but it is as cragsmen that the greatest amount of skill is required, and that their avocation is invested with so much hazard and excitement as to arrest the attention of every visitor. For a demonstration by the islanders of their daring feats on the cliffs is one of the things which visitors are always entertained to. It is not necessary to say much upon this subject, as it has been exhaustively dealt with by previous writers. Moreover, cragsmen quite as daring and clever as those of St. Kilda are to be seen pursuing their dangerous calling in other parts of the kingdom, particularly at Flamborough.

When at work on the more dangerous parts of the cliffs the fowlers of St. Kilda always go in parties of at least two, but more frequently of three or four. One man descends the rocks while the others manage the ropes from above. There are usually two ropes. One is fastened round the waist of the climber, and paid out by the men above as required. The other the fowler grasps by the hand in order to steady his movements and also to relieve the strain on the body-rope as much as possible. The ropes now in use are

of Manilla hemp, but till quite recently they were made of horse-hair, enclosed within a casing of salted cows' hides to protect them from being cut by the rocks. It takes one's breath away to see the fowler being lowered over a precipice of eight hundred or a thousand feet, but the danger is more apparent than real. High as the St. Kilda cliffs are they are comparatively easy for the professional climber, being for the most part broken into ledges, and few of them falling sheer down into the water. As a matter of fact accidents seldom occur, and when they do happen they are generally the result of carelessness. As is always the case in such circumstances, the greatest danger arises from the displacement of loose pieces of rock over the fowler's head. There have been no fatal accidents on the cliffs for a good many years, and the total number for the last forty years is five.

Besides a coil of rope worn round his body the fowler is accoutred with a clasp-knife suspended by a string from his neck and a rod fully ten feet long with a horse-hair noose at the end, which he carries in his hand. The rope is used as already described, the knife is useful in a variety of ways, and the rod is employed of course in catching birds. Creeping stealthily towards his victim the fowler slips the noose gently over its head and pulls the fluttering captive towards him. As a rule the bird sits stolidly on its perch till the fowler has got its head in the

snare, and its companions are so little concerned at its fate that they allow themselves to be taken one after the other in the same way. Occasionally, under certain atmospherical conditions, the birds are wilder and more difficult to capture. As each bird is secured, the fowler breaks its neck with a smart twist and hangs it in a belt round his waist. Sometimes the birds are tied by the neck in bundles and thrown from the rocks to a boat in the sea below if the distance is not too great, or they are given to women to carry. One woman will carry 200 lbs. at a time. All the sea-birds, including the fulmar, are caught in this manner. In the case of the young fulmar, the bird is usually taken from the nest without any trouble.

The puffin, which is so exceedingly numerous, is also caught in other ways. Snares made of horsehair are set in various parts of the cliffs which the birds frequent, and by this means one person may secure several hundred in a single day. This mode of bird-catching is usually pursued by the women. The puffin is also frequently taken from the hole which he burrows in the ground either by the fowler himself or by dogs trained for the purpose, and of which every man on the island has usually two or three.

The mode of catching the guillemot is somewhat peculiar. On the return of the bird in April the people say that it spends three days and three nights on the island and then goes out to the ocean for a precisely

similar period in order to obtain food, such as saithe and other kinds of fish. Anticipating its re-appearance, which they say always takes place at the dawn of day, the islanders take up their stand the night previous on some ledge of rock likely to be frequented by the bird. In order to stand the cold the men are well wrapped up, and this fact has misled the only previous writer who, so far as I am aware, has noticed this peculiar mode of fowling. According to Mr. John E. Morgan, who visited St. Kilda in 1861, "a man with a white cloth about his neck is let down from the summit of the crags at night, and hangs like the weight of a clock immediately before the nests. The birds attracted by the bright colour, mistake the intruder for a projecting portion of rock, and settle upon him in great numbers."

This has evidently been written under a misapprehension. The men are wrapped up simply to protect them from the cold, and so far from their being left dangling in mid-air like "the weight of a clock" they comfortably squat themselves on a ledge of rock, and often go to sleep awaiting the return of the birds with the dawn of day. If the morning is unusually clear the birds noticing the men on the rock beat a hurried retreat, but in ordinary circumstances they alight close by. The men seize them with their hands and dispatch them by twisting their necks. Mr. Morgan says that in this manner three or four hundred

birds are often taken by a single fowler in the course of a night. This appears to me exceedingly improbable, if only from the limited time during which the fowler is able to carry on his avocation. My information from the people themselves is to the effect that a party of two or three men—that being the usual number—will sometimes kill thirty birds of a morning. The guillemot is not a communistic bird like the fulmar, it is not divided; everybody on the island is entitled to as many as he can kill for himself. At the time the bird is taken it is very fat, and the carcasses are salted and preserved.

The catching of the gannet or solan goose is a sport in which most of the men join with great gusto. When the bird returns in April from its winter migration it is very fat and in good condition for food, hence the interest with which its appearance is noted by the people, whose supply of salted provisions usually begins about this time of the year to run short. Little expeditions in quest of the bird set out for Boreray, that being the principal island of the group, as above explained, which the gannet frequents. Like St. Kilda, Boreray rises mountain-like out of the sea. It is $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles to the north-east of St. Kilda, is $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles in length, and rises to a height of 1072 feet—the highest point of St. Kilda being 1220 feet. The island of Boreray presents a precipitous coast on all sides, though in some places the cliffs slope more

gently upwards to the grassy summit, and the ascent is therefore not extremely difficult.

Last April the late schoolmaster on the island was one of a party of thirteen men who visited Boreray on a fowling excursion, and he has favoured me with an account of the proceedings. When the party arrived off Boreray, four men were left to look after the boat, there not being the least bit of beach on which to haul it. The rest of the company, nine in number, climbed to the grassy plateau on the top, where they found shelter for the time of waiting in one of the numerous huts, which are only inhabited on the rare occasions in the course of the year when the St. Kildians come to *pluck* the sheep or kill the solan goose. A fire was kindled and the men gathered round it, whiling away the time with enthralling stories of prowess, till the deepening shadows awoke graver thoughts. An elder of the church, who had been fetched with the expedition for the purpose, then engaged in prayer, and afterwards, a slight repast having been partaken of, the murderous work was begun. Unfortunately for the fowlers—fortunately for the birds—it was clear moonlight the greater part of the night, and this seriously interfered with the work, for one of the essentials to a good night's "take" of gannets is that it be dark. At the outset the company was divided into three sections, and each set off in great spirits to the parti-

cular part of the rocks assigned to it. "Look over the cliff," said one of the natives, in Gaelic, to my informant, when his party reached its station. "Do you not see John in his nightgown?" The playful allusion was to the gannets, which could be seen in their snow-white dress occupying in countless numbers every crag in the yawning gulf below. The birds were asleep, and the fowlers moved cautiously, speaking only in whispers. One after another the party of three men descended the rocks, each with a rope fastened round his waist. There was no difficulty in lowering the first two, but the third had to scramble down unaided as best he could, there being no reserve man above to hold a rope.

It was fearful work. One false step might have proved fatal to the whole party. The nearer the fowlers approached the retreat of the still sleeping gannets the greater circumspection had to be used. The St. Kildians are well acquainted with the habits of the various birds, and they go about their work with the proverbial cunning of the fowler. They have need of all their cunning with the gannet, for this bird is usually as wide-awake as themselves. This bird, the islanders say, places a sentinel on every ledge where any number are perched, and it is the business of this sentinel bird to awaken the whole camp immediately he suspects any danger. When he cries "Beero!" it is a signal to his companions that

danger is to be apprehended. Occasionally, even before the sentinel-bird raises this cry, the expert fowler discovers that it is on the alert from a particular glance of its eye. In either case the fowlers lay themselves down motionless on the rocks and patiently await the quieting of the birds' suspicions. This is known to have taken place when the bird is seen to put its head under its wing. If the bird thinks the alarm was a false one, and that all is well, it cries "*Gorroh! Gorroh!*" and the whole camp at once resign themselves to sleep. The moment the fowlers consider it judicious to advance, they give a signal to one another, and in less time than it takes to tell the sentinel is seized with the hand and its neck twisted. It is then much safer to proceed with the work, but even still it not unfrequently happens that some birds are awakened when only a few of the colony have been killed. What a noise is then set up! The whole flock take to their wings with a loud "*Beero! hurro! boo!*" and the fowlers may have to retrace their steps with little or no spoil. If, however, the birds remain asleep the slaughter goes on, each fowler killing as many as he can in the manner just described. Ledge after ledge is visited till daylight puts a stop to the murderous work. In catching the birds they are usually seized by the neck in case they bite the hand of their captor with their long and powerful

bill. Even expert fowlers are often bitten, and on this particular night the hands of all the nine men were hacked with deep cuts. The night's sport of my informant and his two companions resulted in a "bag" of 160 gannets. On a favourable night three expert fowlers have no difficulty in killing thrice that number. In all more than 500 birds were killed on this particular night, and there was, naturally, great rejoicing at the success of the expedition when the party returned in the morning to St. Kilda.

The young solan goose is ready for the wing in September. The killing of it affords much tamer sport. It is simply felled on the head with a stick as it flutters about its nest. The gannet, like the fulmar, is the common property of the sixteen families, each of whom occupies a croft in St. Kilda. Every carcass, every feather, and every egg is divided equally among them. Those are the only two birds which appear to be treated on socialistic principles. The puffin is anybody's property, and so also are the guillemot and the razor-bill.

CHAPTER XI.

RELIGION AND MORALS OF THE PEOPLE.

It is a singular circumstance that, while for two or three centuries at least, religion has all but constantly

been at a low ebb in St. Kilda, the purity and high moral tone of the people's lives have been extolled by nearly every visitor who has committed his experiences of the island to writing. There can be no doubt the picture has been overdone. One does not see much of the inner life of a people in a hurried visit of a few hours or days, which is all that most of the writers could boast of, and, moreover, there is a glamour about a primitive, patriarchal existence, such as the St. Kildians lead, blinding the eye of the observer to the more subtle vices, which are only less clamant here than in more "advanced" communities.

Perhaps, on the whole, the moral side of the average St. Kildian would be most fairly described as a negation. He has few vices, because the incentives to vice do not exist or exist only in a limited degree; but, on the other hand, neither has he any strongly marked virtues. One previous writer at least, Macaulay, has remarked the negative character of the islanders' moral nature. "Some of them," he writes, "are rather free of vices than possessed of virtues," and he adds "dissimulation, or a low sort of cunning, and a trick of lying, are their predominant faults." Martin took notice of this latter characteristic, which it must be said is still one of the strongest traits of the people. "They are very cunning," he observes, in his quaint way, "and there is scarce

any circumventing of them in traffic and bartering; the voice of one is the voice of all, being all of a piece, one common interest uniting them firmly together." This is hardly consistent with the high-strung eulogy which the same writer pronounces upon the people in another part of his book—"What the condition of the people in the golden age is feigned by the poets to be, that theirs really is; I mean, in innocency and simplicity, purity, mutual love, and cordial friendship; free from solicitous cares, and anxious covetousness; from envy, deceit, and dissimulation; from ambition and pride and the consequences that attend them."

It is always important to remember that when Martin wrote there was no Registrar-General to keep us right on one point at least with the unerring logic of facts. Martin and the subsequent writers who followed in the same vein, may be right or they may be wrong, but it is worth while pointing out that their estimate of the islanders is not borne out in recent times by the statistics of this useful public official. During the thirty and a-half years, ended June last, in which an official register has been kept on the island, there have been five cases of illegitimacy, giving a percentage of 6.25 on the total number of births. This rate is not abnormally high, but it is sufficient to disprove many of the platitudes about the St. Kildians which find their way into print,

and which are simply travellers' tales. The five illegitimate births occurred in the years 1862, 1864, 1876, 1880, and 1884. One of them, that of 1876, was an adulterous case.

It has been suggested that Christianity may have been introduced into St. Kilda by the Culdees, but of this we know nothing. In early times the Druidical customs of the people appear to have become blended with Roman Catholicism, but they have long since disappeared. Immediately prior to the Reformation, the religious oversight of the island would seem to have been sadly neglected. There was no resident priest, but one accompanied the factor or "procurator" on his annual visit, in order to baptise the children born during the year preceding. In the absence of a priest on that occasion, every one, it is stated, baptised his own children. Matters were not mended much for a time after the Reformation, and Martin's account of the doings of the impostor Roderick is a severe commentary upon his own flattering eulogy of the moral and religious condition of the people.

An improvement appears to have taken place about the beginning of the eighteenth century. Up till this time the people had been illiterate, and the credit of introducing letters to the island is due to the Rev. Alex. Buchan, who was sent out as catechist in 1705 by a Commission of the General Assembly. Five years later having been ordained a minister of the church

in St. Giles's, Edinburgh, Buchan was appointed to the pastoral oversight of St. Kilda, the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge providing him with a stipend of 300 merks (£16, 13s. 4d.) Mr. Buchan, according to his own statement, found religion and morals at a very low ebb. One of the endeavours which he set before himself was "to root out the Pagan and Popish superstitious customs so much yet in use among the people," and he established a kirk-session "with a view to the exercise of discipline, and the suppression of immorality." Mr. Buchan continued minister of the island down to 1730, when he died. Following him there was a regular succession of ministers or catechists, who, however, do not appear to have been men of much note, one of them indeed being described as illiterate. With one exception they had not a seat in the courts of the church. The Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, who continued to pay the stipend, were aided by a grant in 1733 of £333, 6s. 8d. from Mr. Alex. Macleod, advocate, the interest to be employed in support of the minister, catechist, or missionary.

An important event in the religious history of St. Kilda was the visit of Dr. M'Donald, "the apostle of the north," in the year 1822. He visited the island at the request and expense of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge. In conveying the request of the Society, the Rev. Dr. Campbell,

Edinburgh, wrote that "the necessities of the islanders are urgent in the extreme." Dr. M'Donald set out for St. Kilda on the 26th August, in company with the tacksman, and after a most tedious passage arrived on September 15. It was Sunday, and the Dr. preached four hours after his arrival. The deplorable state of the people at this time, and the character of their previous religious oversight, may be inferred from Dr. M'Donald's words—"It grieves me to say, and I took pains to ascertain the truth, that among the whole body I did not find a single individual who could be truly called a decidedly religious person." At first his preaching seemed to make a great impression on the people, but within a week we find Dr. M'Donald writing in his diary that he fears the impressions are of short duration, that the people appear to discover little concern about what they hear in the way of religious exhortation. There was a Gaelic schoolmaster on the island at this time, but only one of the natives could read to any purpose.

Dr. M'Donald, who left St. Kilda on September 27, after a stay of twelve days, revisited it in the May following. By this time several of the young men on the island had progressed so well under the Gaelic schoolmaster, that they were able to read the New Testament, and portions of the Old. The people generally were now much better informed on matters of religion than on the occasion of Dr. M'Donald's previous visit.

Perhaps the most interesting thing in connection with the second visit is the insight the narrative gives us of the anti-Sabbatarian practices of the people, which, it would appear, Dr. M'Donald made a successful attempt to put a stop to. "I addressed some hints to them," Dr. M'Donald himself writes, "regarding the due observance of the Sabbath, and pointed out to them from Scripture how that day ought to be kept, and the great evil of indulging in carnal and worldly conversation, and certain practices connected with the business of the week, particularly baking their bread, and carrying their potatoes or other vegetables from the field on that day. I had no sooner finished," continues Dr. M'Donald, "than several of the heads of families came up to me, and with tears in their eyes pleaded guilty. 'We cannot deny,' said they, 'that we were given to these habits, but we have never seen the evil of them, and none told us so till now. With God's help we are resolved to avoid them in future.'" Dr. M'Donald's stay on this occasion extended to fully a fortnight.

He visited St. Kilda for a third time in 1827, and shortly thereafter he set himself to work with all the energy of his nature to raise funds for the erection of a church and manse in the island. He preached over all Scotland, making collections towards this object wherever he went, and at last the amount required was raised. A church and manse were

built, and a minister, the Rev. Neil Mackenzie, was appointed to the charge. Mr. Mackenzie was introduced to the islanders, and began a most useful career among them on Sabbath, July 4, 1830. Dr. M'Donald, who had accompanied him to St. Kilda—this being his fourth and last visit—refers at length to the event in his diary, observing that the day was the most important and delightful he ever spent on the island. Mr. Mackenzie continued to be the pastor of the island till 1844, and we have ample evidence of the good he effected, more especially in a material way, from the statements of different visitors, from his own published notes, and from the traditions which still linger round his name in the grateful memories of the people. He induced the people to build better houses for themselves, to drain and improve their land, and to build the numerous stone dykes which still intersect the island and serve among other purposes to protect the cattle and sheep from the cliffs; he introduced improved implements of agriculture; he procured from charitable people in Glasgow and elsewhere furnishings for the people's houses, such as stools, chairs, hearth-rugs, blankets, and even glass for their windows, all of which it seems were quite new to the islanders; he made himself schoolmaster as well as pastor, and he instituted for the first time—and himself kept during his stay on the island—a register of births, marriages,

and deaths. Mr. Wilson, brother of "Christopher North," writing in 1841, says, "Mr. Mackenzie seems to leave nothing untried to ameliorate the condition of his flock." Writing three years earlier Mr. M'Lean, the author of *Sketches of St. Kilda*, says—Mr. Mackenzie was at that moment in Glasgow on an errand of mercy—"It is well known the people never had a bed other than the earthen floor, or what was little better, a cave in the earthen wall! never had a mill but the *brà*, or hand-mill, never had a stool or chair. Mr. Mackenzie induced them to build better houses, came to Glasgow to plead for them, and, by the assistance of Dr. Macleod of St. Columba and other patriotic gentlemen, has the prospect of returning in a few days with beds, chairs, stools, mills, nay, even glass windows." Mr. Mackenzie, prior to his appointment to St. Kilda, had been tutor in a number of Glasgow families, and the connection with this city enabled him to press the claims of the poor islanders with greater success. A considerable fund was raised, among the subscribers being a number of prominent citizens, most of whom have since gone to their rest. Sir Michael Connal, still happily among us, took an active part in raising the fund, as did also Mr. Peter Ewing, who was in business as a calico printer, and Mr. William Collins, father of Sir William Collins. The gifts at this and other times included, besides the articles specified

above, a pulpit for the church, while Mr. Ewing sent on his own account a small hand-bell, referred to in the next chapter.

Mr. Mackenzie remained in St. Kilda till 1844, when he was translated to Duror. Subsequently he was appointed to the parish of Kilchrenan, in Argyllshire, where he continued in the ministry till his death a few years ago. The same year that he left St. Kilda the people were won over to the Free Church, and they have remained faithful to it ever since. From 1853 to the middle of 1863 Duncan Kennedy was catechist on the island. He was succeeded by the Rev. A. Cameron, who remained about two years, and he in turn was followed by the present minister, the Rev. John Mackay, who took up his abode in October, 1865, and has never since been off the island even for a single day. Even Mr. Mackay's friends, I am afraid, must admit that he is not specially adapted for the charge, which indeed could only be entrusted with absolute safety to a man of exceptional qualifications, and such as are not to be expected for the beggarly stipend of £80 a year. On this subject I cannot do better than quote the words of Mr. Sands:—"The best resident ruler—'guide, philosopher, and friend'—for St. Kilda would be a sensible, firm, and good-tempered old sailor, able to work and repair a boat, to teach the three R's and a little English to the young, and

to scrape a reel on the fiddle for the girls to dance to; and the worst home-ruler would be a well-meaning but feeble-minded, irresolute, yet domineering fanatic, whose servant would lead him by the nose, and get him to preach at any woman to whom she had a spite, who would be obliged to sit and listen in silence, however innocent. This latter character is of course entirely supposititious, but it is quite possible that the Free Church might send such a representative to St. Kilda, to sit like an incubus on the breast of the community. In that sequestered island, beyond the supervision of Sessions and Presbyteries, he might, by working on the religious prejudices of his flock, retain his grasp and exercise a tyranny which would never be tolerated in other places."

Mr. Mackay was at one time a schoolmaster, and was ordained to the ministry only with the view of his being sent to St. Kilda.

Besides the Sunday services and the Wednesday evening prayer-meeting, there is also a thanksgiving service held in the church on the first Tuesday of every month in connection with the preservation of H.M.S. "Porcupine," which was almost wrecked on the island in October, 1860, and the captain of which was deservedly very popular with the islanders. It will be gathered from what I have already said that the St. Kildians are a superstitious people. They are

devout believers in "second sight," the evil eye, and the other forms of superstition which now linger only in the most remote parts of Scotland.

CHAPTER XII.

E D U C A T I O N.

"WHERE do you think these nice children live?" is the question following a group of fine sonsy-looking boys and girls at the top of a "missionary leaflet." Literature of this stamp naturally suggests little pagans or infidels. But no; the children are not pagans, despite the suspicious ring of the question and the auspices under which the little folks make their bow to the public. They are subjects of Queen Victoria, and their home is in Scotland, but, adds the leaflet, they are nearly as much cut off from us as if they lived in Japan.

Child-life in this sequestered and unkindly rock is a subject full of the deepest pathos. It is not merely because one-half of the poor little bodies open their eyes to the glad light of this world, only to close them for ever in the long sleep of death; for the hard fate which meets them at the portals of life pursues them like an avenging spirit all through the period of childhood. Mr. Sands has remarked upon the fondness

which the islanders have for their young. For infants it must be admitted they do manifest a deep love, and the reason is not far to seek, but once the helpless little creatures pass into the age of self-conscious childhood a melancholy change takes place, and one which becomes intensified with the years. Of genuine love between a child, say of school age, and its parents there is none; there are none even of the soft and kindly and confiding relations always associated with the period of childhood, and which one would surely expect to see blossoming in a community so much devoted to pure religion. No such thing. What one finds is an increasing callousness and disrespect in the relations between parent and child. There would almost seem to be something approaching an instinct to cut the little brats adrift so soon as they can shift for themselves. In this we must recognise one of the numerous proofs of the state of semi-savagery from which the St. Kildians have yet to be reclaimed. During my short stay on the island I was more than once horrified with the revolting scenes which took place in different families, and I learned from reliable authorities that such scenes are of daily occurrence, and prove the sad want of affection which the St. Kildian parent has for his or her child, and the child for the parent.

Something has been done to ameliorate the harsh environment of the children. They are now brought

under better and more civilising influences. To teach them the English language is of itself a great step forward; but the establishment of a good school, with a competent master, is sure to be attended with other benefits than those of a strictly educational character. The fathers and mothers of the children of to-day were taught to read their Gaelic Bible; that was the Alpha and Omega of education for them. Later on Mr. Mackay held the tawse on week days besides raising aloft the "hangman's whip" on Sundays, and it may be that he elevated the standard a little. Only quite recently, however—since the spring of 1884—has there been a thorough-going school with a good and competent schoolmaster. To the Ladies' Association of the Free Church is due the credit of starting and carrying on this school. Such a thing as a rate or a tax being unknown in St. Kilda, one would hardly expect to find a Board school on the island, but indeed the school now in existence is so admirably conducted that no public school in the circumstances could well do any better.

The one drawback lies in this, that the master is changed every year. A single twelvemonth's banishment is possibly considered the limit of a desirable man's endurance, and no doubt it would be worse than folly to sacrifice any promising young man's life by locking him up as schoolmaster in St. Kilda for an indefinite time. The masters of this and

similar schools are usually divinity students, who let their regular studies stand over for a year. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the student who allows himself to be sent to train the young St. Kilda idea, even if only for a twelvemonth, does a heroic thing, and is quite as entitled to the gratitude of his church as the missionary who goes to Old Calabar or the Cannibal Islands. Nobody knows how the selection is made, but the sentence of banishment for a year to St. Kilda is announced by the esteemed lady whose name is so honourably identified with the association. Of course the man who is selected has always the option of declining, and this is sometimes done. Mr. George Murray, the present master, is the third on the island. First there was a Mr. Campbell, who went out in the spring of 1884, and he was followed a year later by Mr. Hugh M'Callum, who completed his twelvemonth with the visit of the proprietor's smack in June last.

All things considered, the children have made surprising progress, and now that for the first time in the history of the island the English language is being taught a new factor is imported, and one which must be taken into account in estimating the probabilities of the future. But, while all the children now speak English only one or two of the adults can do so. There are fifteen children attending school at present, and they are divided into three classes.

The senior class (ages from 13 to 14) read the *Fifth English Reader* and the *History of Scotland*, and they also are put through their facings in geography, grammar, and arithmetic as far as bills of parcels. They are made to translate their English lessons into Gaelic, and this is a very useful exercise. In this class there are at present two boys and three girls. The boys speak English very well, but the girls, more bashful and reticent, are further behind. In the next class (ages about 9 and 10) there are three boys and two girls, and the class book is the *Fourth English Reader*. The third class (ages from 6 to 8) read the *Second English Reader*. They also do a little writing on slates, and in arithmetic are exercised in addition and subtraction. There are one girl and four boys in this class. I had the pleasure of attending a kind of non-official examination during my stay on the island, and I am able to speak the more confidently from what I saw and heard of the good work that is being accomplished in the education of the young St. Kildians. Their teacher has, of course, many obstacles to contend with, but all the same the children are becoming good English scholars.

The school is held in the building known as the church. It is noticeable that the schoolmaster, although he is allowed to make use of the sacred edifice itself for the purposes of his school, is not at liberty to use the church bell. I said

something in a previous chapter about this singular bell, which as a matter of fact is reserved for Mr. Mackay himself. The schoolmaster being a very much smaller personage has to content himself with a very much smaller bell. What he has is a small hand-bell such as is used by hawkers on the street. This bell, too, it would appear has a history. A few days before I left the island some of us made the discovery that it bore an inscription, and this we ultimately made out, although with considerable difficulty on account of the deep coating of rust and dirt which sat heavily upon the bell:—

“From Peter Ewing, Glasgow, to the inhabitants of St. Kilda, 1832.”

Even the schoolmaster who had been handling the bell every day for a twelvemonth had never noticed the inscription before.

Mr. Ewing is the gentleman alluded to in the previous chapter. None of the islanders had ever so much as heard his name, at least so they said.

CHAPTER XIII.

POETICAL FRAGMENTS.

DURING my stay in St. Kilda I made every effort to collect and commit to writing any poetical remains

in circulation orally among the people, and in this work I was indebted to the assistance of the late schoolmaster. It is more than probable that the reputation of the islanders for their love of both poetry and music in former times has been greatly exaggerated. Martin writes of "some of both sexes who have a genius for poetry, and are great admirers of music," while Macaulay in even stronger terms, declares the islanders to be enthusiastically fond of music, whether vocal or instrumental. It is strange, if this be literally true, to find Dr. Macculloch, little more than fifty years after Macaulay, stating that there was no musical instrument in the island, and that nobody remembered when there had been one. St. Kilda, Dr. Macculloch says, had been celebrated for its music, but that reputation, if it ever was well-founded, existed no longer. Poetry, he adds, had followed music. Nine years later the "Apostle of the North" on the occasion of his second visit to the island remarked the "musical turn" of the people, who sang such tunes as Coleshill, Bangor, Scarborough, and St. George's in his hearing with great animation, and "in a manner which did credit to teacher and pupils." The last observation is important. It seems to indicate that the people had been taught to sing the psalm tunes named by some one then or recently on the island, presumably a catechist or schoolmaster. If even an acquaintance

with Bangor or Coleshill marks a higher grade of musical culture than that recorded by Dr. Macculloch in 1815, it equally surpasses the state of matters to-day. In another chapter I have made reference to the islanders' utter lack of musical knowledge, as exemplified in the singing in church. Of course it is only sacred music, such as it is, that is tolerated in the island by the present minister.

Whether the poetical genius of the islanders was ever strongly or generally developed—and it would have been strange rather than otherwise had the St. Kildians under such conditions of life not been endowed with a bent for poetry—there is more evidence to-day of its former vitality than there is of the existence at any time of the “musical turn” of the people. One or two of the oldest persons in the island have preserved in their tenacious memories some poetical fragments, which have been handed down orally from past times. These fragments I was enabled to commit to writing in the native Gaelic, and they are now published in some cases for the first time.

One of the oldest persons in the island, the widow of a noted fowler in his day, Donald M'Quien, better known as Domhnuil Og, repeated the following lines from memory. They are somewhat different from a version which Mr. Maclean heard sung on the island in 1838, and which Mr. Seton has reproduced

in his book on St. Kilda. "The Widow's Lament," as my informant called the song, is supposed to be very old. It expresses the feelings of a widowed mother at the loss of a favourite son on the cliffs of Soa. In Mr. Maclean's version there are but three stanzas, while in the following there are four, and the Gaelic of the latter is, I am told, much more like that spoken by the St. Kildians.

THE WIDOW'S LAMENT.

Gur ann thall ann an Soa
 Dh fhag mi 'n t-og nach robh leumrach
 Fear nach fhalbhadh le m'fhacal
 'S nach innseadh dhachaidh na breugan.

Bethedh mo chuid de na h-eunlaithibh
 'S an iarmailt ag èigheach
 Bithidh mo chuid de na h-uidhean
 Aig a bhuidhiann as treuna.

'Sa sheachd beannachd aig do mhathair
 Ga d' chumail sàmhach ri chèile
 Thu bhith muigh fo na stuidhibh
 Agus a mhuir ga d' fhuasgladh ochèile.

Cha tig thu gu d' mhàthair
 Gu càradh do léine
 Thu bhith muigh 's a Gheo-chumhainn
 Gur cianail dubhach na d' dhéigh mi.

It may be as well to give also the Maclean-Seton version for reference:—

Dh' fhag mi thall ann an Soa
 Macan òg nach robh leumrach
 Thu bhi mach sa Gheo-chumhainn
 Gur aonail dubhach na d' dheigh mi.

Cha tig thu gu d' mhathair
 Ged is failneach a leirsinn
 'S tu nach oladh le macaibh
 'S nach innseadh dhachaidh na breugan.

Dh' fhag thu d'fhuil air a chloichna
 Rinn do chorpan a reubadh
 'S fuar do leabaidh fa'na tuinn
 'S tu na d' spurt aig na beisdean.

A song called "*Tobar-nam-buaidh*" (the Well of Virtues) is known to some of the St. Kildians, and it was recited to me as given below by the same old woman. *Tobar-nam-buaidh* is the name of a well of delightfully cool water at the foot of Glen Mòr on the north-west coast of St. Kilda. As the name implies, the water is believed to have medicinal properties. The well is supposed to be very old, and Martin, who calls it *Tou-bir-nimbeuy*, refers to it as the best of the "excellent fountains or springs" with which the island abounds. The Rev. Mr. Mackenzie, among the other permanent improvements he effected on the island, put *Tobar-nam-buaidh* into a state of good repair—though it had a cover of stone even in Martin's time—and so it remains to this day. A Baptist missionary named Alexander Mackenzie, who laboured in St.

Kilda some time prior to the first visit of the Rev. Dr. Macdonald ("the Apostle of the North") in 1822, is reputed to be the author of this song on the well, though it is possible Mackenzie may only have improved upon an older version:—

TOBAR-NAM-BUAIDH (THE WELL OF VIRTUES).

Tobar-nam-buaidh tha shuas 'sa ghleannan
 'S neo-thruaillidh fallain do stòr
 Chuala mi fuaim mu' dh'fhuair mi faisg' ort
 Gur fuaran gast' thu bha beo.

A sruth o chàrn tha àrda creagach
 Do làn co-fhreagradh gach uair
 Mur tig ort crith-thalmhainn a spealgas creagan
 Cha'n fhalbh thu'm feasd gu là luain.

An tobar tha fìorghlan, eutrom, soilleir
 Gun aon ni doilleir fo d' ghruaidh
 Tha sior shruthadh sìos gu fìor o 'n chruinnicheadh
 Riamh am fearann 's an cuan.

Gun reothadh, gun traoghadh, a ghnàth cuir thairis
 Do làn àrd charraig na linn
 Gach neach ud a tha do 'n àros mhilis
 Bithidh shlàinte fallain a chaidh.

Fhreagair Eubha a rithist gu diadhaidh, modhail
 'S ro fhialaidh an Cruith-fhear glic
 Àrd nachdaran glòrmhor dheonaich dhuinne
 Làn chòir air craobhan an lios.

Aon chraobh àluinn tha 'sa mheadhon
 Thubhairt Dia, "Na beanaibhse ris"
 Ma bhriseas sibh àitheantean, dàna, ciontact
 Thig bàs an-ìochdmhor o 'n mheas.

The verses which follow were composed, it is said, by a St. Kilda woman who lived several generations ago. Her husband, the "John" of the poem, set out one night with his father and a boy for *Caolas-an-Dun* or the Dun Strait to catch guillemots in the manner described in a previous chapter. The father lowered his son and the boy to the crevice or *Sgòr*, where they were to await the return of the guillemots from the sea with the dawn of day. There being only one rope, the elder of the two, John, generously gave the use of it to the boy, who was less experienced and stood more in need of it. When the dawn broke, the guillemots alighted on the rock in great numbers, but the boy being unable from his inexperience to kill any, John stretched himself over a ledge to do the work himself. Not being secured round the waist by the rope he fell into the sea, a great depth below, and was drowned:—

'S ann an caolas an lionaidh
 A bhuail Dia am Fear-gleidhidh
 Mhòr thu [two complete lines forgotten]
 (Cha'n è m' athair no mo bhràthair,
 No na dh'fhag mi do chloinn òg
 Chuir falt mo chinn anns na tollaibh
 Air a lomadh gun fheoil).

Cha'n è curam an fhearainn
 Chuir an t-callach mòr s' orm

Mi smuainicheadh a cheangal
 'S e bàs Iain a rinn falbh
 Ged a bhitheadh tu gun òinneir
 'S tu nach innseadh e`orm
 Cha'n è iomairidh na spréidhe
 Chuir na dedir so gu m' shròn.

It is remarkable that nearly all the St. Kilda poetry in existence is pitched in a minor key. Here is another "lament," which was sung by the St. Kildians in former times. Nothing is known about its authorship, but it is believed to be very old:—

A LAMENT.

'S anns san tulaich ud shuas
 Chuir mi m' aighear 's mo laidh
 Fo lic dhaingean nach gluais 's nach tionndaidh
 Gur ann an ciste chaoil an dá thaoibh chuir mi tasgadh
 mo chúim
 Cha'n fhidir thu caoidh no ionndrain.

Mi faicinn leam féin
 Do chuid uidheam ri stéidh
 Làmh a dheanamh an fheum gun dùil ris
 Làmh an t-sonais 's an àigh
 Bu mhaith d' fheum anns gach àit
 Cha bu lapach thu 'n dail na tuirneil.

Ach a Thi 's mòr glòir
 Neartaich Fèin an sliochd òg
 Gun tacsas 's gun sgòra cuil riu
 'S mi faicinn leam féin feartan Mhic Dhe
 'S a ghiorrad gus an pill sinn cunntas.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FUTURE OF ST. KILDA.

THE problem of what is to be done with the St. Kildians is one that now exercises every thoughtful person who feels any interest in the island. It is only within a comparatively recent period that the problem has pressed itself for solution on the public mind. Writers like Martin and Macaulay saw only the most delightful romance in this simple primitive people leading a life of all but complete isolation on their lonely rock; their very countrymen, yet farther removed from them in sympathy and all the concerns of daily life, themselves much less familiar than the natives of England and Scotland, who then were seeking new homes under strange skies thousands of miles away. The romance is gone; it could not by any possibility survive the stern fact of repeated periods of destitution imperilling the very existence of the community. It is these recurring seasons of scarcity that have forced the problem of the future of St. Kilda upon the attention of the public, and have led many sensible people to think that the only way of solving it satisfactorily is to abandon the island. That is the recommendation of Mr. Malcolm M'Neill, inspecting officer of the Board of Supervision, who as

already stated was sent to the island in October, 1885, to report upon the condition of the people. In his official report, made public in April, 1886, Mr. M'Neill says—"During the year 1884 a former emigrant from St. Kilda to Australia returned, and resided for some months on the island; this person seems to have occupied himself in spreading discontent among the people, and in striving to place them in antagonism with their indulgent landlord. But his teaching has produced an effect which probably he did not anticipate, for within the past eighteen months a strong desire to emigrate has sprung up, and, with the exception of one or two old men, I found none who were not anxious to be transferred either to the mainland or to Australia. It may well be worth consideration by her Majesty's Government whether, in view of this disposition of the people, it may not be wise, and, in the end, economical, to assist them in attaining their object, and thus to avoid a recurrence of the anxieties which their isolated position must periodically produce."

On the occasion of my first visit, four days before that of Mr. M'Neill, I sounded the minister of the island on the subject of emigration. As stated in a previous chapter the Rev. gentleman, speaking for himself and the people, indicated much sympathy with what I told him had been proposed—namely, that the St. Kildians should be transplanted in a body to some other part

of the empire—but the day being Sunday, he forbade any conference with the people on the subject. When I revisited the island in June, 1886, I was able to learn with much fulness the views of the great bulk of the community on the question. The first day of my sojourn on the island the minister informed me that the subject of emigration had been much discussed immediately after my first visit, but that it was now forgotten, and was never even referred to by man, woman, or child. This is characteristic of the St. Kildians. They are an excitable, impulsive people, like Celts in general, whether at home or abroad, but they seem utterly incapable of any sustained mental interest. Emigration, like many other subjects, took hold of their imaginations for a day. So long as the fit lasted it engrossed their minds, to the exclusion of everything else. The amount of zeal they showed was extraordinary, and could most easily be explained by supposing that the simple idea of wholesale emigration had never before occurred to their childlike minds as a practical suggestion. But it was dead now, the minister said. It was fated, however, to a very speedy resurrection.

Our smack, as I have said, carried Her Majesty's mails. They embraced eight months' correspondence to the islanders. The average civilised man would not feel happy if he had the accumulated letters of eight months handed in to him of a morning, but the

civilised man is a being with whom the St. Kildian has little in common. In the matter of correspondence the latter has certainly the advantage. The letters which we fetched to the native islanders amounted to the handsome total of nine, and that, it appears, is a fair average for eight months. It represents one letter to every two families. Still the islanders are not without friends who advocate an improved mail service. The point that I want to bring out, however, is that six of the nine letters forwarded by the mail were from St. Kildians in Australia. The St. Kildians settled in that colony appear all to have done well, and, in writing home to their relatives, they strongly advised them to betake themselves to the new country. In one instance the writer enclosed a sum of money to pay the passage out of a recently-married couple, undertaking also to find them a comfortable living on their arrival in Australia. All the letters spoke in the most tempting way of the good living to be obtained in Australia. Only one drawback was pointed out, and that by a female. She said in her letter that the preaching of the Word in Australia gave her cause for much uneasiness. It was not so pure or so pointed as in St. Kilda. She was, moreover, wounded in spirit at the playing of godless organs and the singing of "profane songs" in church. To the St. Kildian this matter is more important even than meal

and potatoes. It was, therefore, satisfactory that another of the colonists reported hopefully on this crucial question. In this case the writer was a man, and he reported that the preaching of the Gospel in Australia suited his taste exactly.

The receipt of this budget of news revived the topic of emigration, but no definite opinion was expressed in the absence of some of the men at Boreray. On their return to St. Kilda on the night of Saturday, June 19, the matter provoked the liveliest discussion. In the end three able-bodied men, two of them married, made up their minds to emigrate to Victoria, where a number of the islanders are already settled, and the vessel which brought me back to Dunvegan carried in the mail-bag a letter addressed to the agent of the Victoria Government in London, making application for assisted passages on behalf of the three men.

The opinion in favour of emigration was almost unanimous, the only dissentients being one or two old men, whom it would be folly to ask to go to a new settlement at their time of life. In some instances, too, the families of the old men would prefer not to leave St. Kilda at present. Without exception the islanders, if they are to leave their home at all, would prefer Victoria to any other part of the world, for the simple reason that a number of their friends are settled there already. I have no doubt that many of the people could readily be induced to go

to any other of the Australian Colonies which offer the advantage of assisted passages. Go when and where they may the people will have to be assisted, most of them being very poor. Still, they will make capital colonists, being strong and hardy and well fitted to turn their hand to any kind of out-door work. A general emigration of the community being for the present out of the question, the proper thing to do would be to take out those families who are willing to go, leaving the others to follow, as they almost certainly will, as soon as circumstances permit them. Surely some of the Australian Colonies will be found ready to establish a new St. Kilda. This much is certain that if nothing is done and things remain as they are the condition of the islanders will go from bad to worse, and destitution periods will recur oftener. The produce of the island is steadily decreasing—feathers, oil, cloth, fish, cheese, and cattle, all show a remarkable falling off. No doubt this has been compensated for to some extent in recent years by the visits of tourists, but for whom indeed the islanders would have been by this time near starvation point. But this source of wealth is a fickle one, and not to be always relied upon.

Failing emigration, as a means of benefiting the islanders, and at the same time relieving the people of the United Kingdom of the anxieties which, in

the present condition of things, the St. Kildians must constantly occasion, is there nothing else that can be done? Undoubtedly the island could be made a good fishing station, possibly the best on the West Coast. To bring this about it would be necessary to provide, first of all, a harbour or landing place. As things stand at present a landing has to be effected as best possible on the surf-swept rocks. This with such seas as prevail at St. Kilda is at all times difficult and often impossible. Three schemes for a place of shelter to accommodate fishing boats have been put before the public—namely, those of (1) Commander Prickett, who commanded H.M.S. "Jackal" on the occasion of a former visit to St. Kilda, (2) Captain Otter, R.N., and (3) Mr. Mackenzie, factor to the proprietor of St. Kilda, the latter embracing Captain Otter's ideas but somewhat extending the scope of the work. Mr. Mackenzie estimates the entire cost of his scheme at less than £1000. One thing I would urge, if such a boat harbour is ever constructed, it should not be altogether a work of charity. The St. Kildians have of late been helped much. One cannot be long on the island without discovering the great moral injury that tourists and sentimentalists and yachtsmen, with pocketfuls of money, are working upon a kindly and simple people. They are making the St. Kildian a fibreless creature, totally dissimilar to all that, with so much justifiable pride, we associate

with the Scottish character. The best gift that can now be made to the St. Kildian is to teach him to help himself. If a boat harbour is to be constructed the islanders themselves should be made to contribute the labour, being paid only moderate wages. The Bay of St. Kilda, where such a harbour would of course be constructed, opens to the south-east, and is perfectly sheltered on three-quarters of the compass. There is good anchorage in the bay, when the wind is not unfavourable, but even the most daring navigators dread an adverse wind in this dangerous part of the North Atlantic, where such terrific storms are often experienced. With such a harbour as is proposed, and with the four boats they presently have, the people would be able to add largely to their wealth, for unquestionably the waters around their island abound with cod, ling, and other valuable fish. Moreover, if the island became a fishing station it would be more regularly visited by steamers, attracted by the prospect of freights, and the grievance so much complained of, that the islanders in the matter of buying and selling are entirely at the mercy of the factor who makes his own prices, would speedily be removed. It is notorious, however, that the St. Kildians are bad sailors and fishermen, and it is doubtful whether a boat harbour would be of much real practical value after all, unless indeed a number of practical fishermen from the East or West Coast

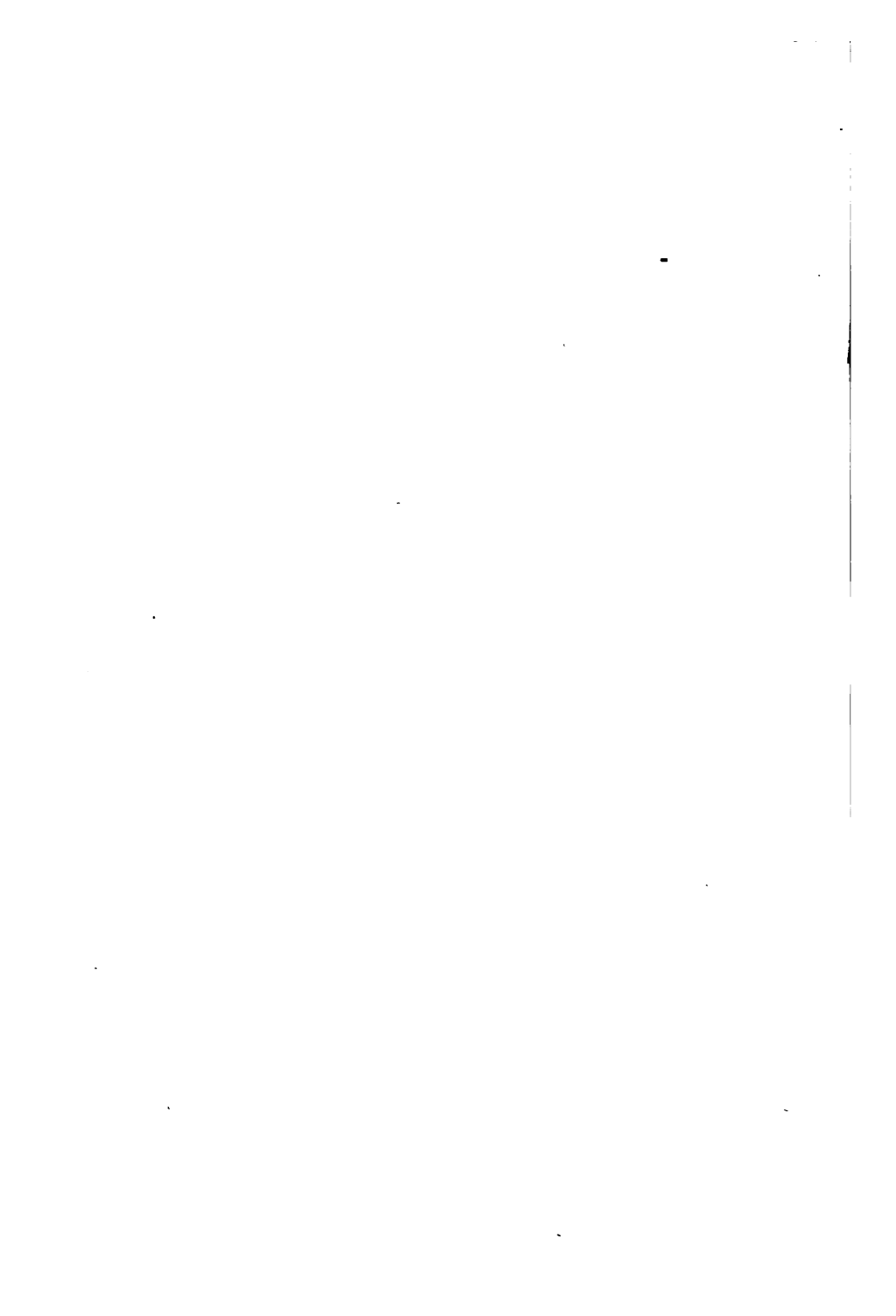
could be induced to take up their abode on the island and impart their training and experience to the natives.

But when all has been said in favour of making the island a fishing station, the fact remains that the most effectual way of benefiting the St. Kildians is to enable them to settle in one or other of our colonies. That is the view the people themselves take, and I have the authority of a great number of them for saying so. When I came away from the island after a stay of fifteen days, all the able-bodied people of both sexes came down to the rocky beach to say adieu and wish us a fervent God-speed, and I was then waited upon by a deputation of ten or fifteen men who asked me to do what I could to further the emigration of the people. I am thus not without a mandate in pleading the cause of the St. Kildians.

Our parting with the islanders was quite affecting. Tears were shed, and the hand-shaking exceeded all conceivable limits. Some of the islanders proposed in all sincerity that we should remain with them and share their humble living, but we replied that we were all sworn enemies of the system of sub-dividing crofts. Most noteworthy of all was the ordeal imposed upon Mr. M'Callum, the vacating schoolmaster. After the singular custom of the island, he had to go through the task of kissing all the women one by one. The cup was too mixed to be tempting. There were

“sweet and bitter in a breath,” and the sweet did not seem to predominate.

Once outside the comparatively smooth waters of the bay of St. Kilda our little craft became the sport of the great Atlantic. Men who go down to the sea in ships have to lay their account for strange experiences. No exception in favour of smacks is spoken of, and certainly our return voyage was as daring a proceeding as even the most seasoned salt could desire. We experienced what the people, in their expressive Gaelic, called a “red storm.” The mighty Atlantic in its terrible sweep threw itself into billows, high as mountains, and our little craft was but a speck on the limitless waste. Yet she held her way bravely, and never was successful result better deserved. We cast anchor at Dunvegan on Friday morning, June 25.



APPENDIX.

It may not be out of place to give a list of the Subscribers to the Relief Expedition of October, 1885, with the amount contributed by each:—

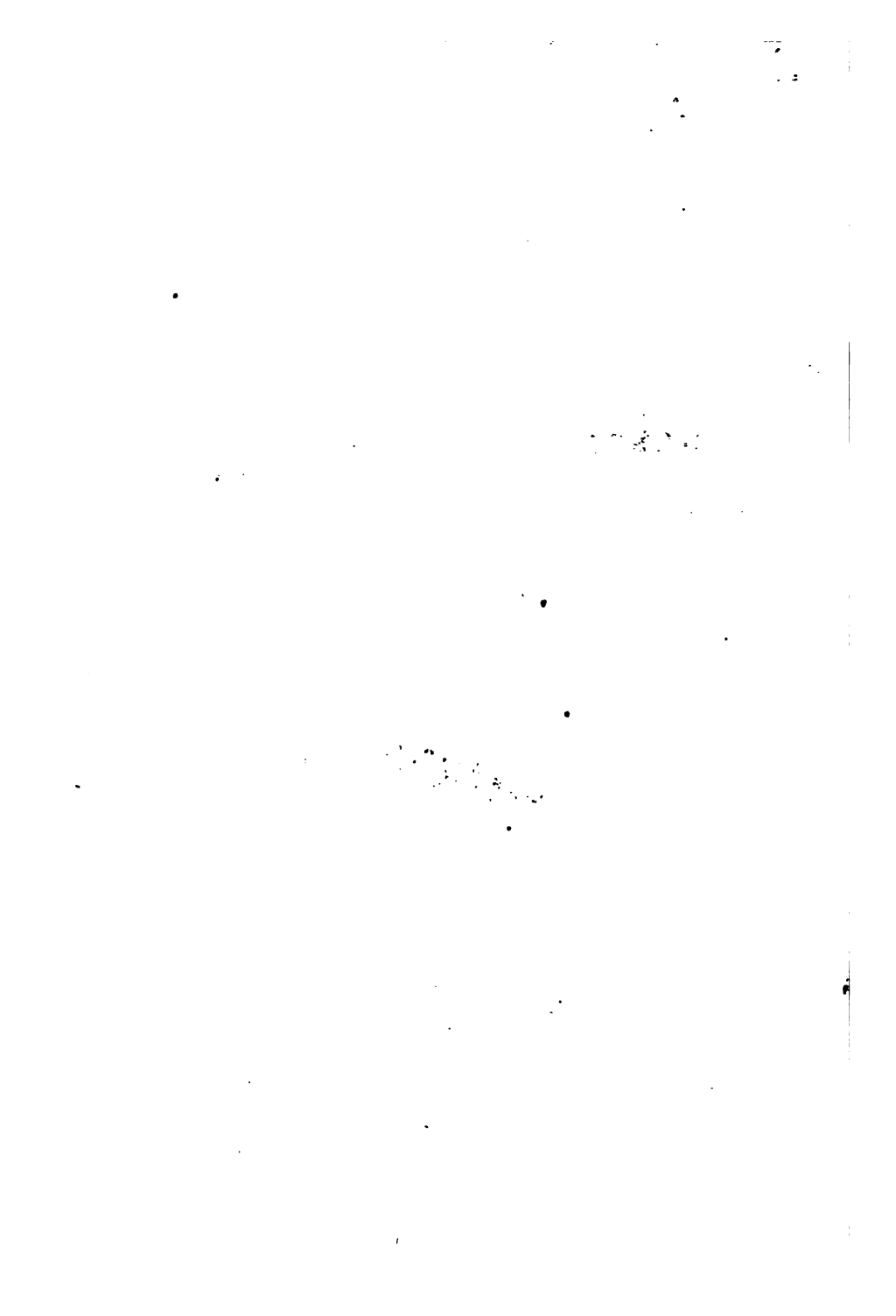
Highland and Agricultural Society,	£25 0 0
Sir William Collins,	5 0 0
Robert Smith Allan,	5 0 0
Robert Richardson, Edinburgh,	3 0 0
“Two Friends,” Balfour,	2 0 0
Robert Winning, Glasgow,	1 0 0
John Inglis, Jun., Pointhouse,	1 0 0
Wm. M’Naughton, Uddingston,	1 0 0
“St. Kilda,”	0 5 0
R. W. M’Cowan, Glasgow,	5 0 0
Alexander Allan, Great Clyde Street, Glasgow,	5 0 0
James Adams, Scotland Street, Glasgow,	1 0 0
Dr. R. Scott Orr, Glasgow,	1 0 0
John Clark, Paisley,	5 0 0
Boys of Fettes College, Edinburgh,	2 0 0
William Lawrie, Joppa, Edinburgh,	0 10 0
Mrs. Black, Glasgow,	0 10 0
Mrs. Haig, Pitlair, Cupar-Fife,	2 0 0
Lord Provost M’Onie, Glasgow,	2 2 0
Lord Dean of Guild Blackie, Glasgow,	2 0 0
Dr. Fergus, Glasgow,	1 0 0
William Clark, Montgomery Crescent, Glasgow,	2 0 0
P. M. Inglis, Glasgow,	1 0 0
John Ferguson, Larkfield, Partick,	1 0 0
J. D. Thomson, Rosslyn Terrace, Glasgow,	1 0 0
William Black, Newton Street, Glasgow.	0 10 0
Carry forward,	£75 17 0

Brought forward,	£75 17 0
Drysaltery Trade, per J. W. Spence,	0 14 0
P. Henderson & Company, Glasgow,	5 0 0
R. W. Robertson, Kilcreggan,	1 0 0
W. T. M.,	1 0 0
"A Sympathiser,"	1 0 0
"St. Mungo,"	1 0 0
Robert Blackie, Glasgow,	1 0 0
Alexander Donald, Crosshill,	1 0 0
M. Riddell, East Kilbride,	1 0 0
Per Principal Rainy, Edinburgh—	
Professor Granger Stewart, Edinburgh,	3 0 0
Mrs. Black, Edinburgh,	2 0 0
Per Miss Rainy, Edinburgh—	
Mrs. Macintosh,	1 0 0
Mrs. Cleghorn,	1 0 0
Miss Rainy,	1 0 0
Miss Bartlett,	1 0 0
Mrs. Darroch,	1 0 0
Mrs. Wahab,	1 0 0
Dr. Joseph Bell,	5 0 0
J. B. Gillies,	1 0 0
Mrs. Wood,	1 0 0
William Wood,	0 10 0
Principal Rainy,	1 0 0
"A Friend," Edinburgh,	1 0 0
Col. A. G. Young,	0 10 0
	<hr/>
	£109 11 0
	<hr/>

THE END.







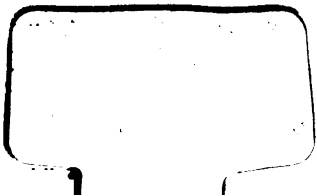
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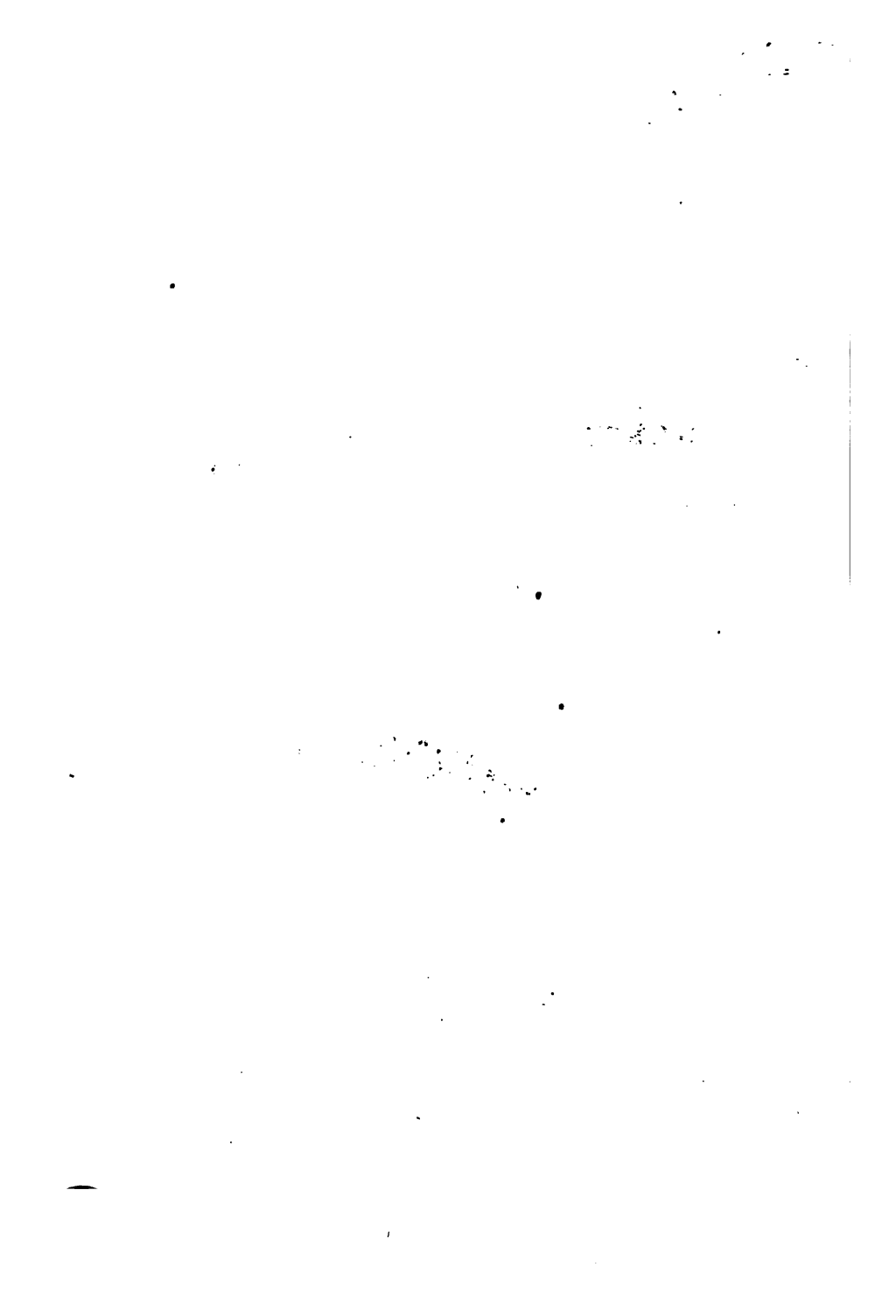
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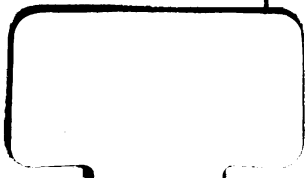
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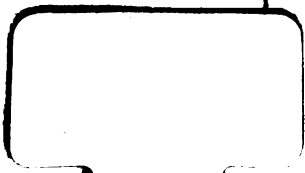
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